In Another World With My Smartphone

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In Another World With My Smartphone 10


AT LONG LAST...
ALL NINE BRIDES
HAVE GATHERED!


"BEHOLD OUR TRUE POWER!
ORTLINDE OVERLORD!"
SERIOUSLY...? THEY'RE JUST GETTING OUT OF HAND NOW. WHAT KIND OF NAME IS THAT?!

Chapter I: The Demon Kingdom Xenoahs

Spring had sprung.

The countries in this world didn't operate by conventional seasonal laws, so nations that had all four seasons sometimes bordered nations with only one or two.

Some people didn't enjoy seasonal shift, but there were many who did. The people of Eashen, for example, enjoyed the changing of the seasons and all that it brought.

It just so happened that the vast majority, about seventy percent, of Brunhild's citizens were Eashenese. I was also particularly happy that Eashen had four seasons.

I'd planted a row of sakura trees along the road from the castle to the town itself. They were finally in full bloom, and that meant only one thing. We had to have a grand celebration.

Adventurers loved celebrations, of course. And so, singers, performers, and revelers had already gathered beneath the trees along the road already. They weren't causing any problems or anything, so I saw no reason to move them aside. They were noisy, but that was about it. The townsfolk actually seemed to enjoy it, all things considered. Naturally, I'd harshly reprimand anyone that actually caused any problems for the celebrating people, though.

Little stalls and such had sprouted up around the place as well. I was pleased, as it seemed Brunhild had its own little cherry blossom festival going on.

The people living in my castle were among the revelers as well. Julio had planted various immature sakura trees within the castle walls, and they were blooming quite admirably. The sight of their petals

fluttering into the castle moat and waterways was far too breathtaking to describe.

I had prepared a speech to give to the alliance after our scheduled meeting. Honestly, I had wanted to invite the leaders of Felsen and Ryle to the meeting for that very reason, but they weren't formally members, so having them celebrate alongside us would've been seen as a little strange.

Our grand celebration already had delegates from Belfast, Regulus, Refreese, Lihnea, Mismede, Ramissh, Lestia, and Roadmare, after all... It was quite varied enough.

We had a dining table in the courtyard, with a vast amount of magnificent dishes that Crea had cooked up atop it.

As the host, I held up my cup and proposed a toast.

"It is my greatest hope that we all continue to prosper in the future, and I also wish for us all to find happiness... Cheers!"

"Cheers!"

The sake that everyone had was a gift from Ieyahsu. I was drinking juice, though. I was a minor, after all. There was no need to overdo it. Though apparently I was considered old enough to drink in this new world...

A lot of our knights were taking turns to come in and enjoy some of the celebration as well. They were sitting at their own table, though. And naturally, I'd forbidden the on-duty knights from partaking in the sake.

Several knights from each country, with the exception of the leaders' personal guards, were eating along with us, actually. I had the ones that were drinking hand over their weapons, however. I didn't want anything unfortunate happening.

“If you’d told me a few years ago that we’d be doing something like this, I wouldn’t have believed a word...”

“I completely agree. The knights of Belfast and Regulus drinking together, having fun... Mismede’s beastmen and Ramissh’s templars eating from the same plate... Far too much in the status quo has changed since Touya showed up... Rather, the status is no longer quo at all.” The emperor of Regulus and the king of Belfast talked amongst themselves. They were sitting next to their daughters, who also spoke up.

“That’s just normal for Touya, Father. Birthright, race, and national boundaries are nothing to him.”

“Touya is a wonderful mediator... He makes many people happy. That’s why Yumina, I, and the others are engaged to him, after all! He’s amazing.” Yumina and Lu’s comments made seemingly reluctant smiles rise to the faces of their fathers. I was a little embarrassed, so I was glad they didn’t go on any further.

“Touya, my lad! Could you maybe get out some of those Frame Units? I wanna fight against the knight king!” Mismede’s beastking merrily spoke up. Luckily, I had installed a bunch of Frame Units into the courtyard just in case people wanted to use them out here. All Frame Units were calibrated the same, so victory entirely depended on the skill of the user. I guess weapon choice also helped, though.

The knights began a tournament using the units, each one demonstrating their own skills. The foreign soldiers had grown fairly accustomed to piloting, surprisingly. That was only natural, though. They’d been fighting the Phrase en masse lately.

Moroha was enjoying her sake, but gradually more and more requests came from people wanting to challenge her. The challengers were all from other nations. They wanted to test their mettle against the legendary swordswoman from my country. The

knights from our order saw their faces and could only reply by somberly shaking their heads. It had been shattered. The foundation of their self-confidence had been... completely annihilated...

The female knights weren't itching to fight, though. Instead they'd gone off to visit Karen. They were probably hoping to get advice.

Hm... Wonder what they're... Oh. Isn't that Knight Commander Limitt from Roadmare? She seems to be listening to Karen pretty intently... Guess even stoic girls like her are full of passion.

Someone else was guarding Doge Audrey for the day. It seemed fair to me. She needed some time to stretch her legs now and then, or something along that line.

Doge Audrey wasn't drinking either, just like me. Neither was the pope. I wondered if they were abstaining for any particular reason.

"Seeing the beautiful dance of these petals makes me wish for music... Come to think of it, Your Highness... Does Brunhild not have an orchestra?" Doge Audrey watched the cherry blossoms fall with a soft smile on her face.

"I'm afraid not. Even if we did, I doubt they'd see much use. Celebrations like this are rather rare in these parts." Brunhild didn't have much in the way of nobility. Unlike Regulus or Belfast, I couldn't think of any dukes, barons, or counts. It would probably be a good idea to introduce some kind of social order, though.

Employing an orchestra might have been a long shot... but that didn't mean music wasn't on the table.

I conjured up a **[Gate]** and pulled a piano into the courtyard. The sudden appearance of the huge black thing made Doge Audrey freeze up in surprise.

"Oh! Are you going to play that?!"

“Ooh, Touya! I love the way you play, I really do! What are you gonna play?”

Linze and Sue rushed over as I sat down at the piano. I pressed a few keys to ensure it was still in tune. Doge Audrey seemed to recognize that the piano was an instrument, but seemed rather curious about how it worked.

Sue quietly sat next to me, eagerly anticipating my tune. *Hm... Let’s see... How about this one?*

I began to play my tune. The melody began to flow along with the gentle flutter of the cherry blossoms, and gradually everyone began to slow their actions as they turned to hear what I was playing.

It was a famous song composed by Edward Elgar. Salut D’Amour, Love’s Greeting. The story goes that he gifted it to his fiancee.

His fiancee was around 9 years older than him, her social status and political stance were different to his as well. Despite the objections of their families, they were still happily wed. The tune carried that kind of powerful feeling.

He also composed the Pomp and Circumstance Marches that were partially integrated into the British patriotic song, Land of Hope and Glory. I personally liked Salut D’Amour more, though.

My performance came to an end, and I was met with applause. Sue grabbed on to my arm all of a sudden, and I caught her before she bowled us both onto the ground. *Geez, did it move you that much?*

“Incredible... Your performance was wonderful, but... this instrument is magnificent. What is this, Touya?”

“It’s called a Piano. You can press down on the different keys to make different noises, see?”

I smiled at the pope as she questioned me, pressing down one of the keys to illustrate my point. *Wait... Don't churches have hymns and stuff?* I set Sue down and turned to the pope.

"What instruments do you use to accompany your church hymns?"

"Ah, we use basic instruments... However, none are quite as diverse as this one."

"Then you can have this one as a gift. Any adept musician should be able to pick it up."

"Wait, really...?" I had no problem with duplicating it in the workshop. I didn't really want to bother teaching people about how to use it, though. Even that felt a little much.

"Ah, Grand Duke...?"

"Hm? What's up, Sakura?" Sakura was already standing by the piano. Kohaku was beside her.

"I'd like to sing. Could you play that song?"

"Oh? You mean the one I taught you earlier? I'm not really so sure if that song's appropriate for the current season, though."

"I think it's fine. Play, please."

Geez, when'd you get so pushy? Fine, whatever... That piece is a little tough, but I got it.

I would've liked to include some backup instruments like brass or drums, but it was a situation I couldn't help. The song she wanted me to play was really more of a disco tune, too.

I invoked the Null spell **[Speaker],** using it to create two magical sound-projecting constructs. One big, one small. The small one was Sakura's mic.

Then, I fixed my position on the chair and changed my posture. The sound of my piano rang out across the room, all thanks to my

speaker magic. It was a pretty swinging tune, so everyone's bodies moved naturally to the rhythm. Even Sakura started swinging a little bit as she prepared to sing.

Eventually, Sakura faced the small magic mic and began her part. Her voice wasn't quiet, as it was coming right up from her depths.

Everyone moved to the invisible pull of the music. The lyrics were in clear English, so the people of this world couldn't possibly know the meaning. Still, good music had no borders.

The group known as Earth, Wind and Fire had been brought to this world now, it seemed.

Sakura's surprisingly deep, soulful voice began to echo around the area.

Whoa... This is great, I'm really getting into it... Heh, it's fun.

Everyone began to sing along with Sakura, even if they didn't understand what was being said. They all began to rhythmically clap their hands, too. It almost felt like a live concert, with the amount of enthusiasm in the bustling area.

The song finally came to an end, and it was met with a roar of applause. Sakura looked extremely pleased with herself.

"That was incredible! Just who is she?"

"She's our household's main singer." I smiled at the pope, and Sakura's face immediately fell to neutral. She bowed her head, and then hid herself behind my back. She was definitely shy in front of strangers, which was amazing given how brazenly she sang. Her bashfulness was a little endearing, though.

"Y-Your Highness!" I raised a brow as Spica the dark elf ran toward us. She certainly stood out from the crowd due to her beauty. Even by elven standards, she was stunning. She looked far better than she did when I first met her... That wasting disease was truly awful.

“What’s wrong?”

“L... Lady Sakura lost her memory, did she not?”

“Yeah, what about it?”

The dark elf looked at Sakura, who was still cowering, and then spoke up.

“L-Lady Farne... Is that you?”

“Mh?” Spica was staring over at Sakura as if she’d seen a ghost. I wondered what was up.

“Who’s this Farne person?”

“A-Ah, of course... Sorry. Back in Xenoahs, I served as the personal guard to a beautiful girl. Her name was Lady Farnese Forneus... I... Please forgive me, it’s just... Lady Sakura’s voice sounded much like hers... Please forgive me for standing up. I was hit by a sudden wave of nostalgia, and I thought... for a moment, that Lady Farne might still be alive... Her hair is so distinctively different, her face too, but even so, I... I’m sorry.” Spica forced out a quiet, lonely chuckle. This Farne person must have meant a great deal to her. I wondered if the death of Farne and Spica leaving Xenoahs were connected in some form.

“When I looked at these beautiful sakura... Cherry blossoms, was it? They reminded me of Lady Farne, because of her hair. It too was such a beautiful pink.” Spica’s eyes followed the wandering sakura petals. I could almost feel the pain in her heart.

I see... So she got confused by Sakura’s voice, and the petals made her nostalgic, huh... That’s sad. Wait, hold on...

“Uh, Spica... Pink? This Farne person had pink hair?”

“Er, yes... Is that an issue?”

“No, but you said that Sakura’s hair is different.”

“Hm? Yes, for some reason I associated Lady Sakura with Lady Farne, despite the fact that Lady Sakura has such beautiful black hair.”

What? Black...? Is that how it looks to Spica? Pink, sakura, those two colors are pretty damn distinct.

Is there some kind of magic at play here? Something preventing certain people from seeing her real features? I don’t think Sakura’s using magic, though.

“What the...?”

“Is something... wrong?” Spica looked at me in confusion. I ignored that, choosing to face Sue instead.

“Sue. What color is Sakura’s hair?”

“Huh? Isn’t it the same color as these cherry blossoms? You gave her that name because of her hair, right?”

“Wha—?! N-No! I-Is it... p-possible that...? Your Highness! D-Did Lady Sakura have a medallion or anything with her?!” Sue’s response seemed to have sparked something in Spica.

She had something like a medallion when I saved her, right...?

“...This?” Sakura took out her tiny silver medallion from her chest. It was around ten centimeters in diameter.

“I... C-Could you... Could you please remove it...?” Spica called out to Sakura, her tone desperate. Sakura did as she was told, though she looked confused. She slowly removed the medallion from her person.

“A-Ah...” Spica began to cry, and the tears didn’t stop coming. She knelt in front of Sakura and reached out to take the girl’s hand. Then, she lovingly pressed the girl’s medallion against her own forehead.

“L-Lady Farne... It was you... I-I knew it, I... I-It’s you... Lady Farnese Forneus... Y-You survived... You really survived...”

“F-Far... Ne?” Sakura looked tremendously confused as Spica continued to weep.

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“So you’re saying that Sakura and Farnese Forneus are one and the same?”

“Yes, I am. This girl is Lady Farne. I’ve watched over her since she was young, and there’s no mistaking it at all.” I sat with Spica in the castle hallway. She seemed pretty convinced. Even though she had no idea until now, she was absolutely certain that Sakura was Farnese.

“It’s the result of this medallion, the Protean Eye. Its power can distort the perception of certain items, to specific species. From the looks of things, it was made so demonkin wouldn’t know who she was. It’s likely that any other demonkin like myself would see her hair as black.” She looked down at the medallion that Sakura was wearing.

Made enough sense to me. It was all because of the medallion she was wearing, which was actually an ancient artifact the entire time... To humans she looked normal, but to demonkin her appearance was altered.

“Sakura... Does the name mean anything to you? Farnese?” Sakura, who was seated by me, shook her head firmly.

“Not at all. I can’t remember a bit of my old life, not even Spica. My apologies.”

“This can’t be... Gah, this is troublesome... Though, I suppose I should count my blessings. You’re actually alive, after all.” Spica looked sad. That was only natural, mind you.

That reminded me of something, though... *Spica said she used to guard Farnese, right? So that must mean...*

“Hold on a sec. Spica, the Frennel family acts as guards for the Xenoahs’ overlord and his family, right? Wouldn’t that make Sakura a princess?”

Spica averted her gaze, but she looked frustrated. I wondered if it was a mistake to ask. Something like that was probably meant to be a secret.

After a short while, she let out a deep sigh and spoke up.

“...That is correct, yes. Sadly, I am no longer a citizen of Xenoahs, so I suppose I can talk about this... Especially given the situation. Lady Farne is indeed the illegitimate child of Overlord Zelgadi von Xenoahs.” Sakura simply looked over at me and tilted her head in quiet confusion. It made me wonder if she couldn’t understand her current situation.

“Illegitimate? You mean she was born out of wedlock or something? Is she meant to be a secret?” I didn’t have any idea of the social ramifications. Would a person even hide away a child they’ve had from their family? I figured Overlord Zelgadi’s wife was probably terrifying.

“Only a few people know of Lady Farne. She didn’t possess the overlord’s prongs, the proof of being the overlord’s child. That was why she was... Taken care of.”

“The overlord’s prongs?”

“Those who are born from the overlord’s lineage have horns sprouting from their foreheads. Gender is irrelevant. Lady Farne lacked them, however. Her magical power was more than enough to prove her legitimacy as his child, but she was still spurned. Lady Farne’s official existence has been wiped away from the records. As far as Xenoahs is concerned, she never existed in the first place.”

Wait, what?! Why are horns that important? That's your kid, man! You can't just do that to your own kid! I frowned, and Spica continued. She probably knew exactly what I was thinking.

"The overlord did this as a mercy. He believed that Lady Farne and her mother, Lady Fiana, would be safer. There are many in the overlord's court that see the lack of horns as an affront to our nation. The overlord likely thought that Lady Farne would be happier living a normal human-like life, instead of being a political bargaining chip."

"Human? Then... does that make Sak— Farnese's mother a human?"

"It does. Typically, a child born from the overlord's lineage and any other species will always be a demonkin. However, it seems that Lady Farne is more like her mother, which makes her pretty much entirely human. It's likely that her mother's blood won out due to some freak incident, but still..." Spica opened her mouth to continue before glancing over at Sakura and closing it again. It seemed something was on her mind.

According to Spica, Sakura's mother didn't want to become a concubine. Apparently if she had become one, she'd have been separated from her daughter. The women that the overlord took as his had their formal records erased, it seemed.

After that, Spica went to live with Sakura and her mother. Ostensibly, she was a guest of the Frennel family, staying along with them. Apparently they lived a quiet and peaceful life together.

However, things changed when Sakura turned ten years old. The overlord's prongs had apparently been dormant within her, and they suddenly sprouted from her head. This caused no end of trouble and surprise for the overlord and the Frennel family alike. As Sakura's horns increased in length, her magical power intensified as well.

Regardless of gender or age, the successor of the overlord's title in Xenoahs was determined by magical power and potential. And

eventually, Sakura's magic grew to the point where it was greater than the crown prince's.

Sakura's mother didn't want her to become the new overlord, but the noble houses were already plotting. Everyone looked at them with suspicious eyes, certain they'd usurp the throne.

They all believed wholly that Sakura would succeed the title of overlord.

The first and second princes lost their mothers to illness, so their extended families launched a very public support campaign. Sakura was considered a pest to them, after all.

The overlord gave the Protean Eye to Sakura, so that she might protect herself. The artifact absorbed the magic of its holder in order to project an illusionary appearance around them. It was a temporary measure, until Sakura could become powerful enough to shrink the horns by her own power.

But then one day, on a shopping trip, Sakura and Spica were attacked by a group of masked men.

The men were skilled fighters and, although Spica had a blade, she didn't have her shield on hand. From what I understood, she managed to acquire a makeshift shield and stall for time. Sakura escaped in the confusion, but the men launched a suicide attack and Spica fell unconscious.

"Wait, those masked attackers..."

"Indeed, I found out later that they were assassins from Yulong. I don't know if they made a private deal, or if it was a government order."

I knew it... That reminds me, Sakura did help me that one time... Maybe that means she had a small resurgence of memories. That means her memories could come back someday... Yeah, I'd like that.

“I woke up in my childhood home, and my father informed me that Lady Farne was dead. There were pieces of her body scattered across the courtyard. The sheer horror I felt when I held her severed arm and leg? Honestly, I’ll never forget it.”

After that, Spica left Xenoahs. She was burdened with the guilt of her failure, it seemed. The Frennel family wasn’t formally disgraced for the incident. After all, Sakura wasn’t formally recognized by the state, so failing to protect someone who didn’t exist wasn’t a true failure.

Spica refused to follow that logic, however. She was completely unable to forgive herself. That was why she abandoned her home.

Spica followed the trail of those that had murdered her charge. It didn’t take her long to identify the masked men as Yulongese, and she made her way into the nation. As she headed toward the capital, the Phrase invasion began.

Yulong was completely annihilated, and the ones behind the attack likely died without ever facing real justice. She then wandered aimlessly, without a master or purpose, until finally she was stricken with the illness that brought her to Brunhild. She apparently traveled to Brunhild in order to find a place to die.

“Uh, let me cut your story short a sec. I have a few issues with it.”

“Like what?”

“Well, first of all... I found Sakura with missing limbs, dying. That much is true, but... it wasn’t in Xenoahs. It was in the mountains of Eashen. If the assassins were from Yulong, then what reason would they have to kill her? And plus... Sakura didn’t have any horns or anything when I found her.”

“Ah, uhm... Grand Duke? I, well... I can make them come out,” Sakura said, fidgeting as she quietly spoke up.

“Huh?”

She closed her eyes. Gradually, silvery horns began to sprout from her head. Sure enough, they must have been the overlord’s prongs.

“I thought so. You managed to hide them?” Spica seemed to be aware of the phenomenon.

“Why didn’t you mention this before, Sakura?”

“I... Well... I was scared... about being different... I-I learned later on that there was no discrimination here, but... there was never a good moment to bring it up...”

“Did you help heal Spica because she was a fellow demonkin?” Sakura nodded slightly.

Wow... She even risked catching the disease? Ah, wait... Sakura didn’t actually touch her, did she? It was a Silver Moon employee that brought her to her room.

Either way, the evidence was pretty damning. Spica was right. Sakura was Farnese Forneus, princess of Xenoahs.

“Well, now we know, Sakura... Or uh, Farne. What should we do?”

“Sakura is fine, thank you. It’s the name you gave me, Grand Duke. I like it quite a lot...”

Well, if you say so. If Sakura’s fine with you, it’s fine with me. Probably better to keep using it anyway, just in case.

“I still don’t have my memories, so my other name means little to me. I do not wish to return to Xenoahs, and I do not wish to seek revenge on those that attacked me... However...”

“Hm?”

“I wish to see my mother.” Sakura quietly muttered as she stared me down.

“What about the overlord?”

“I do not feel any connection to him, so that doesn’t matter.”

Well... Okay. Her reaction made a bit of sense to me. Sounded like they weren’t terribly close, anyway. Sakura simply didn’t feel a need to talk to him. It didn’t really sound like the guy was a bad person or anything, though...

“Where is Sakura’s mother right now?”

“Likely still at our family home. After Lady Farne died, she collapsed out of strain, and she’s been bedridden since.” That was completely understandable. We definitely needed to show her that Sakura was alright. However, her memories were lost, so that would be an issue.

“If only we had something that could restore memories... Even **[Recovery]** was fruitless. But maybe if we take you to Xenoahs we could stir your memories a bit.”

If she walked around the place she grew up, then that might help. Seeing her mother would likely stir *something,* at least.

*Alright, guess I’ll just use **[Recall]** to peek into Spica’s mind, and then I’ll use a **[Gate]** to get to the Frennel... house from... Oh. Ohhh.*

“AM I AN IDIOT?!”

“G-Grand Duke?!”

“Wh-What happened?” The two of them looked at me in surprise due to my sudden outburst. Their glances were anxious, but I just felt like a total dumbass.

“What the hell?! I’m a complete moron! There’s definitely a spell that can bring back memories! I’ve been using it the whole damn time! I’m such an idiot!”

I thwacked my head against the table.

Kill me now. Just kill me. I am such a dumbass. What the hell was I thinking this whole time?

I had **[Recall],** which was a spell designed to delve into memories. The spell opened up the memories of another person and allowed me to read them freely. The memories I obtained from using it also allowed me to open up portals to places from the other person's past.

What I didn't remember, however, was that the spell could also pull memories up to the surface. I was a fool to forget that.

Think of it this way, an average person wouldn't remember the items they saw on a lunch menu a week ago. Still, if I used [Recall] to peek into that person's memories and see the menu, they'd also get that vision as well.

Hell, the word **[Recall]** meant to recover something and bring it back. I couldn't believe I'd been so ignorant. I deserved to be smacked in the face. Hard enough that I'd lose a couple teeth, even.

"...I'm sorry. I'm really sorry, Sakura!"

"That's... okay. Really, I don't mind."

Even if she didn't care, I still felt like a dumbass.

Why didn't I think of this sooner?! Gaaah... I wish I could vanish right about now...

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Someone's chasing me.

There's a man... or a woman, perhaps? Black clothes... Curved sword... Sliced my back.

I've fallen, and I try to stand, but... my leg! Sliced beneath the knee, I can't get up. I raise my arm, but he swings again. It bites into my wrist, and crimson blood spills from the stump. I can only see red, it hurts.

I'm going to die. I don't want to die. Don't kill me. I need to get away. Away from them. Away from this place. If I don't escape, I'll die...

Sakura suddenly muttered a word that came to her from nowhere.

"[Tele...port]!" In a flash, Sakura was submerged in cold water. She didn't know what had happened. Her limbs flailed. She couldn't resist the water current, lost her breath, and then fell unconscious.

I was holding Sakura's hands in mine, forehead pressed against hers. I had just witnessed her memories through **[Recall].**

"I see... That's how it happened, huh?"

"...I remember. My name... Farnese... Farnese Forneus... I was attacked along with Spica, and I..." Sakura quietly muttered as if confirming the truth to herself.

I had a vague idea of how Sakura came to be in Eashen. The fear of death likely forced her to acknowledge the dormant Null magic inside her, which meant that **[Teleport]** was her spell, and it moved her from one place to another. She teleported to Eashen and fell into the river there. Her horns probably vanished for a while due to the magic power it took to teleport away.

"Are your... Are your memories back?" Spica quietly turned toward Sakura.

"They're vague, I'll admit. But I know you, Spica. And I remember my mother as well. I remember... many things, now."

"Lady Farne..." Spica began to weep. Sakura saw this, and gently smiled toward her. However, I could feel her hands trembling.

"Sakura... Are you scared of something?"

"A... A little... I didn't like remembering how... frightening it was." Her face was pale, and she gave a small, forced smile. It wasn't exactly surprising. My magic gave her vivid memories of being

hunted down and nearly killed. She had her memories back now, but those were memories anyone would want to forget.

“It’s okay, don’t worry. I’ll beat down anyone that tries to hurt you, Sakura, so please don’t be scared.” I tried to comfort her by gently ruffling her hair. The trauma she’d suffered was a harsh one, but I wanted to ease her burden in any way I could.

“I-If... If it’s you, Grand Duke, then... I feel safe.” Sakura smiled, sniffled, and held on to me.

A-Ah... Sakura? Y-You probably shouldn’t do that kind of thing... Spica’s giving me a really bad look right now... M-Maybe... W-Wait, wha— E-Eek! Who’s staring at me?! I slowly turned my head toward the door. I heard it creak open, slightly, then I could see the faces of eight girls lined up in a row. They stared in a vertical line. *What the hell kind of frightening totem pole is this?!*



“The ninth... huh?” my fiancees muttered in unison.

P-Please stop... Don’t act like that! Don’t look at me like that! C-C’mon!

“Frankly speaking, **[Teleport]** is an unstable movement magic. Your **[Gate]** is a lot more accurate.” Leen was giving me a lecture as she sipped tea.

“What do you mean by unstable?”

“First of all, when you use **[Gate]** you’re moving to a place that you remember, right? But with **[Teleport]** you need to know its exact longitude and latitude. You can’t go anywhere already occupied by something tangible, and you can only move yourself. You might be able to move two people if you hold hands, but that’d be the absolute limit.”

“So when she went to Eashen...”

“It was entirely random, direction-wise. And the distance she traveled was as much as her magical power would allow her. If it had been another direction, she might have ended up in the sea, or the desert.”

Welp... That would’ve been bad. She could’ve ended up at the bottom of the sea, or in a volcano, or a swamp. Seems like if you don’t have an exact handle on how this stuff works, you could end up in a dangerous place.

“That being said, **[Teleport]** has good merits for short-range use. You don’t have to physically move through something like your **[Gate],** so perhaps you could use it to teleport behind an enemy as a surprise attack?” *Makes sense. “Nothing personnel kid,” and all that, huh...? Guess it depends on how it’s used, though.*

I decided to give it a go.

“[Teleport].” I immediately teleported from my chair to the corner of the room.

Wow, this feels horrible. The sudden dissonance of visual change made me nauseous. I couldn’t imagine using it in battle unless I got really used to it. It didn’t really cause any physical strain, at least. Plus, there was always the option of chaining the attack.

“What an absurdly powerful fiance we have... Goodness me...” Leen simply stared at me and shook her head. I was used to this kind of reaction at this point.

“So, Saku... Uh, Farne. C-Can Farne use this spell?”

“Sakura is fine, Linze. I can’t really use it right now, since I don’t exactly know how it works...” Sakura smiled at Linze.

Hm... So she can’t understand the spell herself? Did she only manage to use it because of stress or something? Still, it managed to save her life, so it’s all good. I mean, she’ll get the hang of it with practice, right?

“If she only awakened her Null magic, it means she doesn’t have a good feel for it. It’ll only work if you manage to use it in a certain manner. Still, that manner depends on the person, so it’ll take her a bit.” Elze butted in as she munched on a cookie. Apparently it had taken a while for her to get used to using **[Boost],** too.

“So, what are we going to do... Will Sakura return to Xenoahs?” Lu cut right to the chase. That was definitely something we needed to address. Sakura’s feelings were important, but she was still the princess of Xenoahs. Illegitimate or not. She was the successor to the throne, but not officially... I kind of figured that if she stayed in Brunhild and we stayed quiet about it, nobody would necessarily have to know.

Regardless of her choice, I figured she’d want to see her mother.

“...I wish to stay here instead of Xenoahs. I’d like to live in Brunhild, with Spica and my mother.”

“I-I feel the same, Lady Farne. I wish to serve Brunhild as I have been up until now. My elder brother will succeed the Frennel house, so there are no issues there.” Spica made her intentions perfectly clear.

We couldn’t just harbor them, though. At the very least, we needed to speak to the Frennel family. And probably the overlord as well... Maybe. If he wasn’t married to Sakura’s mother, then I didn’t really think I needed permission. Even that aside, the thing about the Yulong assassins was really rubbing me the wrong way.

I didn’t have any solid proof, but... I wondered if someone within Xenoahs had made a deal with them. A deal to have Sakura killed. Though, there were a few holes in that theory, like the actual involvement of Yulong. I didn’t know if they were paid off, or offered sensitive info... I didn’t understand where Yulong fit into the picture, really. Hell, Xenoahs was known for being closed off to dealing with other nations, so it really might’ve just been an external attack.

Taking all that into account though, it was most likely that someone in Xenoahs wanted Sakura dead. It’d have to be someone in a position of power, as well.

Following logic, it’d be someone who wanted to keep her away from the line of succession... The first or second prince, perhaps...

“Sakura, you don’t want to be the overlord, right?”

“Absolutely not. Not even if it stopped the heavens and earth from switching places. Not if it stopped hell freezing over.”

That’s pretty intense... I guess if she says that in public it might help? Wait, no, that might just make things worse. It’d be better if the world still thinks she’s dead. Hell, it might be a case of people acting in the interests of the princes without them even knowing. If they were even responsible to begin with, anyway.

“Well, whatever the case, we have to go to Xenoahs... Or at least to Sakura’s mother. In other words, we need to go to the Frennel household.”

“That’s right. We must speak with Lady Fiana about how to proceed.” Spica nodded her head. I decided we should go sooner rather than later.

I took Sakura, Spica, and Kohaku along with me for the trip.

I used **[Recall]** on Spica to obtain the relevant memories and then opened up a **[Gate]** to reach her family home.

Spica went through first, and we followed dutifully after.

The portal took us to the entrance of her family’s mansion. Spica nodded as if to confirm it was the Frennel family home. We didn’t want Sakura to be seen outside, so we ended up making the portal go directly into the building.

There was a luxurious red carpet decorating the floor, and a beautiful painting caught my eye. It was an image of a man, a woman, three young boys, and a little girl sitting on a chair. Seemed to be family portrait, which meant that the girl was Spica. Her face looked pretty similar, at least.

“This is certainly nostalgic... Indeed, it’s true... I’ve been here before.” Sakura muttered quietly. That was a good sign, though. Her memories were clearly coming back stronger.

Sakura glanced around for a moment, and then began sprinting down one of the corridors.

“L-Lady Farne?!” Spica hurriedly followed after her. Kohaku and I didn’t really understand, but we ran too.

A young-looking maid stood wide-eyed as she watched us run by, struggling not to drop her washing basket.

“L-Lady Farne?! A-And M-Miss Spica?! Wh-What?!” Sakura completely ignored the maid, and bolted into a specific room.

We finally caught up to her and looked inside. What we found was a large bed surrounded by a soft white veil. There was a woman sitting up in the bed. She looked to be about thirty. Her face was pale, and her hair was a pure white. However, she bore a striking resemblance to a certain someone, which meant she was...

“F-Farne...?”

“M-Mother?! Mother!” Sakura bounded toward the bed and threw herself into her mother’s arms. She pulled the woman into a tight embrace and began to sob.

“Y-You... I-Is it really you, sweetheart? You’re a-alive... You’re alive!”

“Waaah...”

“Lady Fiana... It’s true, Lady Farne is alive. She was saved from certain death, by this man. The grand duke of Brunhild.” Spica’s words seemed to register in the woman’s mind, as she brought her arms around Sakura’s body and began to sob as well.

The daughter she believed to be dead was finally home. The relief and happiness she must’ve been feeling were probably indescribable, so I decided that I shouldn’t butt in.

We just decided to watch the two of them hug it out for a while.

“Er... Who are you?” The maid turned to me with suspicious eyes. Well, that was a fairly reasonable question.

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“Words alone could never be enough. Thank you so much for saving my daughter.”

“Don’t worry about it. I just did what I thought was right.” Sakura’s mother, Fiana, kept bowing her head toward me.

It looked like she was in a dire state, so I cast **[Recovery]** and **[Refresh]** on her, which made her look a lot better.

I think seeing her daughter probably did more for her than my spells ever could, though.

“You saved my daughter, as well. On behalf of our whole family, I thank you.” The next person to speak up was a dark elf sitting down on a chair. It was Spica’s mother, Swellra. She had dark brown skin, long silvery hair, and pointed ears. She looked incredibly young, as well, almost around Spica’s age. The two of them could’ve been sisters at a glance.

Elves and dark elves lived exceptionally long lives, apparently. But unlike Leen and the fairies, they did continue to age. Just slower. I was curious about how old she actually was, but I knew better than to ask.

Her husband seemed to be absent for the time being, so it was just myself, Kohaku, Sakura, Fiana, Spica, and Swellra sitting with some tea.

“I never thought there’d be someone who could cure that disease...”

“We’re currently researching it in Brunhild. If we manage to make a medicine, we’ll pass it on to Xenoahs.”

“Thank you,” Swellra said, then bowed her head.

Flora had harvested some of the skin flakes that had fallen off Spica in order to work on a cure. There were demonkin in our country, after all. Even if there weren’t all that many, I didn’t want to run the risk.

Eventually, I decided to get straight to the point.

“So, then... Sakura... or, er, Farne... would like you to come and live in Brunhild with her, Ms. Fiana.”

“Me? In Brunhild?” Fiana raised an eyebrow in surprise.

“I’ve done a small investigation about what happened. I don’t wish to be rude, but Sakura wouldn’t be the only one at risk if she stayed here. As her mother, it’s certainly possible that you might be attacked as well. For now, things are safe because everyone thinks she’s dead, but we can’t guarantee that safety forever.” I trusted the people in the Frennel household, but information had a way of leaking out. Even if word got out though, they’d be well protected if they lived in Brunhild. Our country was well known for slaughtering dragons and wiping out Phrase, among other things.

Fiana turned to her daughter with an uneasy expression on her face.

“This is what you want?”

“It is, yes. Brunhild is a beautiful nation. Everyone lives together in harmony, regardless of race or creed. I’m sure you’d enjoy it there too, Mother. Rather certain of it, in fact.”

“I see.” Fiana gave her daughter a gentle smile, then turned back to me.

“Is there anything for me to do in Brunhild?”

“Do you have any particular talents?”

“Er, well... I’m a decent seamstress. I also used to teach children when I lived in Felsen...”

Huh, you’re from Felsen? The fact that she was a teacher definitely caught my interest.

“As it so happens, I was thinking of opening up a school so the children of my country could benefit. It’d be good if we had a professional like you working there... Is that alright?”

“Unless it’s a particular field, I should be fine giving general education...”

“Well I was thinking stuff like ethics, reading, writing, mathematics, and history. Something like that, I guess. It wouldn’t just be you teaching, either.”

“In that case, I’d be happy to.” I’d been meaning to build a school for a while, so Fiana was a godsend for the future of Brunhild.

“There is one thing, Your Highness... My daughter and I have both relied on the patronage of the overlord to continue living here... If we plan to leave his charge, then I believe we should inform him.”

“Ah, I was worried about that...”

“He’ll be happy to know that Farne is alive, as well. It took a lot to restrain him when he heard she died... H-He was about ready to go on a rampage.”

Huh... So he cared about her after all, then? If my daughter was killed by Yulong, I definitely would’ve waged war on them.

“How would I go about meeting the overlord?” I turned to Swellra and posed the question.

“I will ask my husband when he returns. It shouldn’t be a huge problem.” Swellra’s husband was the personal guard to the overlord. They were childhood friends, apparently, so they had a very close relationship.

Well, even if Brunhild is a little country, I’m still royalty. I doubt I’d be turned away.

“Alright, that’s settled. For the time being, then, I’ll—” My words were cut off by a sudden rumbling sound, and the ground itself quaked. The cups and plates in the room clattered and fell to the ground, as if affected by some unseen shockwave.

“Wh-What the?! An earthquake?!” I looked around, trying to determine what was going on, when a maid suddenly barged into the room.

“M-Milady! Th-The castle! P-Pandemonium is...!” I dashed out into the courtyard and invoked **[Fly]** quickly. Then, I looked down from the cloudy sky and saw Pandemonium, the overlord’s fortress, towering over the castle town. However, something was amiss. It was aflame.

Why the hell is the right tower crumbling? What happened here?!

“Kohaku, keep everyone safe. I’ll see what’s happening at the castle.” I sent a telepathic message to Kohaku as I flew away.

《As you command. Be safe.》

Looking down with my bird’s-eye view, I noticed that there was smoke as far as the eye could see. Corpses were strewn all over the place, too. They seemed to be Xenoahs guardsmen.

I landed on the ground and tried to look for survivors, but I couldn’t find any at all. The corpses just kept piling up, and their lifeless bodies lay still around me.

I went inside Pandemonium and followed the trail of the dead. It was absolutely a one-sided slaughter. Each and every one of the dead men had been pierced through the heart.

“Gyauuugh!” I heard a terrified shriek, so I ran toward the source without thinking.

I came out into the courtyard and found someone surrounded by dozens of demonkin knights.

It was humanoid in shape. Mostly covered in crystal materials. Sharp spines of glassy phrasium jutted from its form.

It had piercing red eyes and spiked crystal ‘hair,’ so to speak.

“A Dominant Construct...!” *What the hell... Why now, why here?!*

Unlike the Dominant Construct I'd seen before, this one didn't have much about the chest. It seemed more toned and muscular. In short, it was masculine in form.

How did it slip by our sensors...? Wait... Shit, there isn't a guild branch in Xenoahs! I looked over and saw him laughing. He continued his mockery as he stretched out his arm. It took the form of a sharpened spear and stretched out to kill the guardsmen. *Oh no you don't!*

"[Shield]!" A clanging sound rang out as the spear bounced off my invisible force field. The laughing Phrase turned to me, his expression soured.

「#im＊@n+oh@o々m @〆ek@?」

"...I don't understand you. Use this world's language." He kicked off the ground and charged toward me instantly. *He's fast, but...*

"[Teleport]." I teleported myself right behind the Dominant Construct.

"And then... **[Power Rise]!**" I boosted my natural power and slammed a kick into his back. He shot away like a pinball and crashed into a nearby wall, which crumbled on impact.

The Phrase stood up, unharmed, as the debris scattered around him. He was only dirtied a little, but otherwise didn't have a single scratch. *Welp. I tried.*

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"I already said I don't understand you." The Phrase looked at me, clearly annoyed. Then, it stabbed its right arm through the head of a nearby corpse, immediately pulled its arm back, and stared at the body. After that, a beautiful crystal flower began to bloom from the mangled mess of bone and brain on the ground. The flower aged

quickly, and nearly withered, but just before it crumbled it bore an almond-shaped object. *Is that a seed, or a fruit...? What?*

The Dominant Construct plucked the object from the ground and tossed it into its mouth, making loud crunching sounds as it munched.

「+no#domo÷t u々ku=rik%@ene△eto€i k〆e n＊eek@」 It then brought its left hand to its own throat, and crushed a small area. *The hell is this shit?*

「# t€o、@、@..... Ah... How's this?"

"I understand you now..."

"Oh. How fortuitous. The connection was made, hm? Seems even a being such as you can bask in my full grace, now." He spoke with a masculine tone, grinning like a madman as his red eyes locked on to me.

"You aren't bad... No, you aren't bad at all. Certainly a worthy adversary, I must say. You are most interesting, little man."

"You're... a Dominant Construct, right? How'd you get here? What are you doing here?"

"Oh, that? It's a trivial matter, I assure you. I simply plucked at the seams of the boundary. I planned on killing as many as I can before the recoil hits me, but this delay isn't too bad... You are most interesting, after all."

Recoil? What's he mean by that? The Phrase nonchalantly transformed his spear-like arm into a thin blade. I followed his movements and plucked Brunhild from my waist, activating Blade Mode in the process.

"Are you here looking for the Sovereign Core?"

“Ohoho. You know it? Indeed, I am. I, the magnificent Gila, will strike down all the miserable wretches who stand in my path. And I ain’t gonna let nobody stand in my way! So, y’get it yet? Die fer me, trash.” Gila came rocketing toward me with a furious slash. Moroha was faster, though, which helped me out a bunch. I just barely managed to dodge it thanks to her training. Then, I turned in the air to slash at him, but he caught my weapon with his left hand. Even if Brunhild could easily slash dragons, it was nothing compared to phrasium skin.

“Gun Mode!” I quickly transformed the weapon, allowing it to escape from his grasp, then shot all six phrasium bullets point-blank into Gila’s chest. After that, I reloaded in under a second and fired the second barrage at his face.

Gila was knocked back, but did a flip in midair. As he landed, he grinned broadly.

“Wahaha! Amazing, amazing! It’s been a long time since someone actually posed a threat, you know?! I must thank you for the gifts, but here, have them back!” Gila pointed the fingers of his left hand toward me, and five small bullets shot right out. I barely managed to dodge four of them, but the fifth caught my shoulder and burrowed its way in deep.

*Shit! I should’ve used **[Teleport]** there!*

He regenerated the tips of his fingers and rushed forward again with another slash.

“[Teleport]!” I teleported myself up to the castle rooftop, and used the period of confusion to heal up my shoulder with magic.

By the time he found me, I’d already used **[Storage]** to pull out a massive warhammer made of phrasium, which I raised above my head as I jumped down from the rooftop.

“[Gravity]!” I poured a massive amount of magic into the hammer that came down flat against Gila’s body.

“Smash into pieces, you bastard!”

“Guh... Raaargh!” Gila crossed his arms together and braced against the strike, pushing the hammer aside. The hammer hit the ground, denting the very earth and whipping up a cloud of dirt and sand. His power was unlike anything I’d ever fought before.

I deactivated the weight magic and leaped to the side. Upon inspection, I noticed that both of Gila’s arms were seriously damaged, and they had several cracked lines running through them. But, in a matter of moments, those injuries regenerated and he was fighting fit once more. *Fuck... This guy is a Phrase, after all...*

“Vermin! You’ve really gone and done it now! To think that my beautiful arms would splinter against you... I’m gonna kick yer ass, ya hear me?! I’ll fuckin’ break you!” The sound of cracking glass echoed out into the air, and the very space surrounding Gila opened up. Two Lesser Constructs, Cricket-types to be specific, appeared from the holes in space.

He can summon them?! He grabbed the two creatures with his hands, and I heard the grating sound of glass cracking against glass. He’d somehow fused his body with theirs, effectively turning their two bodies into gigantic arms for himself. I felt like I’d seen this on a TV show before, but I had bigger things to worry about.

The Phrase Cores within the two Lesser Constructs began to glow brightly, and he pointed both of his hulking arms toward me. *Wait, no way...*

“Perish now, ya rat bastard!”

“[Reflection]!” I deployed a reflective barrier at a forty-five degree angle.

In a flash, a horrific ray of light shot its way out from Gila's body, cracking the two Cricket Phrase in the process. It struck the barrier, bounced off, and flew high into the sky.

"Gh... Ghah... D-Damn it!" The barrier started weakening, so I had to pour more magic power into it. The attack didn't even last ten seconds, but enduring it felt like an eternity. I couldn't withstand the entire attack, and the barrier broke. Part of the guard tower behind me was instantly vaporized.

After that, I stared Gila down with a scowl on my face. His arms rested by his sides.

"You filth... Just who the hell are ya, huh?!"

"Mochizuki Touya. Touya's my given name. I'm a sworn enemy of the Phrase. Make sure you remember me." The two Lesser Constructs fused to Gila's arms finally shattered and broke off, falling to the ground. The smirk on his face was long gone.

Then, a strange thing happened. His entire form shook, like an after-image.

"Gh... Recoil's hitting already? Shit... Welp, guess that's it then, huh...? Touya... I'll remember you. Next time we meet, I'll paint the floor with your carcass."

I wasn't sure why, but he clearly had to return back through the boundary. Gila's body grew fuzzy, like a bad signal on TV, before he began to fade away.

No way! You don't get to just fade off all cool like that, I'm the hero here!

"[Slip]."

"Waugh?!" The fading image of Gila's body fell down on his ass.

Bwahaha, you dumbass! So long as you're touching the ground, even someone like you can get slipped up!

“Gah!” I guffawed like an idiot, jeering at him as he faded away. He didn’t seem to appreciate the mockery at all.

“Y-You filth!” He charged toward me, but vanished before he managed to make contact.

Only the dead Lesser Constructs remained.

“Whew...” I took a deep breath and rubbed my temples. *I’m exhausted... This is probably the first time I’ve used this much magic power. This guy was on a whole other level. Honestly, if I didn’t have* ***[Teleport],*** *I might’ve even been a goner.*

I sighed and looked around. The remaining knights were gathering in the area, trying to determine whether I was friend or foe.

“Uh... Hi. I’m the grand duke of Brunhild, Mochizuki Touya. Any chance I could speak with the overlord?”

Honestly I wouldn’t have minded if they’d said no. I was so tired that I would’ve been fine just going to sleep and talking to him a day later. I honestly would’ve been fine collapsing in a heap on the ground.

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“Farneeeeeese!” We were in the Frennel family home when the door opened with a thud, and the overlord of Xenoahs, Zelgadi von Xenoahs, cheered out in abject joy at the sight of his daughter. He brought his arms out and attempted to catch her in an embrace. Sakura responded by swiftly dodging, leading the man to barrel head-first into a couch.

“Why?!”

“Frightening... And gross...”

Well, I could understand that angle. He was crying like a big idiot and had snot flowing out of his nose.

Sakura quickly hid from her father, moving behind my back.

“Grand Duke, I appreciate you saving my little girl, but I have a problem with this bodacious display of flirtation! I am her father, you know that?!”

“This isn’t flirting...” *Don’t waggle your finger at me like that! What kind of demonic overlord are you, anyway?! You’re a seriously creepy doting dad!*

The Overlord’s Prongs sprouted from his head beneath a bed of bright red hair. His skin was pale and his ears were pointed like knives. He was adorned in a beautiful regal cape, colored red and gold. Indeed, this man was Sakura’s father... The overlord of Xenoahs.



After I fought against Gila, the Dominant Construct, I met up with him to explain what had happened. I also met the patriarch of the Frennel household, Sirius. He was the overlord's personal guard, as well as Spica's father.

The moment I explained the situation to the overlord, he dashed out of his fortress at full speed. He was... insanely fast. But given the circumstances, that was pretty understandable. I didn't think about using **[Boost]** or **[Accel],** since I knew exactly where he'd be heading. That much was obvious, at least.

Anyway, that was how we both found ourselves at the Frennel household.

Spica and Swellra found themselves dumbfounded by his sudden entrance.

"Now now... Please calm yourself."

"H-Hmph. Are you siding with the grand duke here, Sirius?"

"In a sense, yes. Or perhaps I'm siding with Lady Farnese." A rather youthful dark elf appeared from behind me. He was Spica's father, Sirius. His skin was dark brown like the rest of his family's, and his hair was long and silver, tied up in a small knot. He looked incredibly young, a trait common to his race... But honestly, even the overlord looked young enough to be in his twenties. I wondered if the overlord's lineage had long lasting lives. I also wondered if that meant Sakura would stop aging at a certain point, too.

"If we look at the facts, the grand duke saved Lady Farnese, saved my daughter, and saved Xenoahs itself. Would you not agree, Your Vileness?"

"Buh..." The overlord wrinkled his nose and sighed. I wondered if Xenoahs would be alright with a guy like that at the helm...

Fiana moved before the overlord, crouched down on one knee, and began to talk.

“Overlord Zelgadi... Our Farnese is an adult now, and she is capable of choosing her own path in life. Our daughter wishes to return to Brunhild with the grand duke, and live at his side. I would like to join my daughter as well. I appreciate what you have done for us up until now, but I ask that you grant our humble request.”

The overlord froze up on the spot, his mouth hanging open in surprise. After a brief delay, he suddenly started stammering and flailing his arms around.

“W-W-Wait a sec! Hold on! Fiana! Y-You and Farnese? In Brunhild?! Absolutely not! I cannot allow it!”

“Dear Overlord... I am not your bride. I am my own woman. My life is my own to dictate.”

“I-I... I know that, but...!” The overlord faltered in the face of Fiana’s icy declaration.

S-Scary... Kind of reminds me of my own mother... She yelled a lot too. At any rate, the overlord definitely looked like a child being scolded in this situation.

“Th-Then you shall become my queen! My first and second wives have long since passed, so you’ll simply...”

“I refuse.”

“Really?!”

Fiana smiled gently and completely shot down the overlord’s proposal. *S-Super scary... I guess this is the power of a mother, huh...? Even so, she’s being a little too curt with a demonic overlord, isn’t she?*

I realized pretty fast that Fiana would be a perfect hire as a schoolteacher. The ability to keep even the overlord in line would surely prevent students from becoming unruly.

“If I marry you, then our Farnese would have to become the overlord upon your passing. Neither her nor I wish that fate, so I must decline.”

“Guh... But... Farnese is my daughter as well, no? That doesn’t mean I control her, but I still should have a say.”

“Yes, you’re right. She is your daughter, so please come and visit her more often... In Brunhild, I mean.”

“Gh... Buh...” Fiana’s smile broadened as the overlord slumped his shoulders in defeat. He took a deep breath, in and out, and then started walking toward me. Then, he bowed his head. His spirit honestly looked crushed, so I felt a bit sorry for him.

“Please... Please take good care of my daughter.” In that moment, he wasn’t speaking to me as the overlord of Xenoahs. No, he was but a simple concerned dad. And because of that, I wanted to reassure him.

“Absolutely. I’ll do my best to protect the tw—” I was about to continue my sentence when he suddenly placed both hands on my shoulders and raised his head. His eyes glared into mine, and further beyond. The deathly stare emanating from the demonic man pierced my very soul. Frankly, I thought I was gonna poop my pants.

“I will never, *ever* forgive you if you make my little girl cry. Is that understood?”

Wha... Is this a threat? Am I being threatened right now? Sakura, who was hiding behind my back, suddenly came out and stared the overlord down.

“My happiness is contingent upon being in the grand duke’s presence. I have the permission of Linze and his other brides-to-be, so I shall join his family. Is that understood? You bother me, Overlord. You are unsightly.”

“Whuh?!”

“Ohoho... You’re moving along that fast, Farnese? I can’t wait to see what my first grandchild looks like.”

Wait. What?! Hold up! No way, she got permission?! When did that happen?! Why’d they strike without me knowing?! Fiana looked on with a happy face as the overlord slumped to his knees. He sniffled a little bit, too.

“B-Bother you...? U-Unsightly...? F-Farnese said I bothered her...”

Did it really hit you that hard? Geez... I ignored the sniffling overlord and turned to face Sirius.

“By the way, your daughter is a member of my knight order.” Spica moved to face her father after I spoke.

“Father. I will stay in Brunhild and protect Lady Farnese with my life. I swear upon our family name and honor.”

“I understand, sweetheart. You walk your own path in life, after all. I pray for your continued happiness. Your mother and I are proud.”

“Father... Thank you.” The two of them embraced. I could see tears forming around their eyes. Frankly, their physical appearances threw me off. Without any outside context, you’d assume they were lovers.

Sirius seemed to be a very understanding father, though. A stark contrast to a certain overlord... I turned my gaze back towards Zelgadi. He was still mumbling.

“I’m not a bother... am I? N-No way... I-I’m a good dad, right? It’s only normal to be worried... It’s normal! Th-There’s nothing wrong

with my feelings.” I decided not to pay too much attention to him, and I doubly decided never to become like him.

“So... were you able to determine exactly who orchestrated the plot to kill Sakura... Er, Farne?”

“As troubling as it is to admit, we’ve found neither hide nor hair. If I did find him, though, I’d rend the flesh from his bones.”

Sakura held on to my arm as her father responded to my question. I could see the bloodlust in his eyes as he thought about the mastermind.

“If you don’t mind me saying, I think it was likely planned by someone who would be troubled by Farne ascending as overlord.”

“I realize what you’re trying to say, Grand Duke. You believe one of my sons may have been behind it, but I assure you that isn’t the case.”

“How can you be so sure?” The overlord slumped back into the armchair and folded his arms. He was looking at me for the most part, but his gaze turned to Sakura every now and then.

“Let’s take First Prince Faron, for one. If I were to describe him positively, I’d say that he has a one-track mind and is very goal oriented. If I were to describe him negatively, I’d say that he’s an idiot. He’s a fair and just person, and I can’t possibly imagine him ever considering assassination. If someone came to him with such an underhanded idea, he’d be more likely to kill that person on the spot.”

“And the second prince?”

“Second Prince Farese... He’s a coward. Meek. The kind of person who’d sooner just not become the overlord than go to the lengths of assassination. In that boy’s mind, there are only books, books, and more books. He hates danger, and avoids trouble at every turn.”

He certainly seemed quick to judge his own sons. It was far different from how he treated Sakura. If I were to guess, I figured he was the kind of guy who wanted to dote on his cute daughter, but wasn't too interested in lavishing praise upon boys.

He probably wanted to announce her as the new overlord the moment that her prongs appeared, but Fiana likely put a stop to that. Sakura didn't want to rule, after all. That seemed reasonable to me, since it would've brought forth a whole mess of problems.

Still, the situation seemed to be a mess enough regardless.

"So who could it be?"

"It may be my late first wife's family. The Ribbuck household... Or it could be the Arnos household, which is the family of my late second wife. It's also entirely possible that it could have just been greedy nobles, as well." It'd be advantageous for the family related to the prince who ended up becoming the overlord. That certainly made the Ribbuck and Arnos suspicious.

"Which of the two princes is currently in line for succession anyway?"

"I'm unsure. Both of them carry some modicum of magical might, but they fluctuate by day, and are fairly evenly matched." *This is getting more annoying...*

"Have either made any friends in Yulong?"

"Not that I know of. The Ribbuck estate is located along the border of Yulong and Xenoahs, however. It wouldn't be impossible for them to make such ties. Still, the Arnos are a family of traders. While we don't officially dabble in international trade, we can't write them off. They could've easily made mercantile connections with the outside."

Both of them sounded pretty suspicious to me. However, I was just getting tired of it at this point. It would've been pretty easy if I could

bring Her Holiness the Pope over from Ramissh and use her mystic eye to quiz everyone about whether or not they'd collaborated with Yulong. That sounded like a smart idea to me, but I also couldn't realistically bring the pope over for something like that. Bringing all the suspects over to Ramissh wasn't gonna cut it, either.

Maybe the storehouse has a lie detector in it or something... Well, even if there is one, I can't really submit it as evidence.

Sakura's memories definitely confirmed that they were Yulong assassins, but Yulong had been so thoroughly trashed that they were no longer traceable.

I wondered if they'd pipe down if it was officially announced that Sakura wasn't going to ascend to the throne, but kind of doubted it. They'd probably move to target the other prince, and then maybe some kind of pro-Farnese faction would rise up. Things would get dangerous for Sakura in that case.

I wanted to take care of the situation thoroughly before taking her back to Brunhild, but wasn't entirely sure where to start...

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A man slinked into a dark alley, heading toward his designated meeting point. He was in the corner of a grimy looking warehouse street, somewhere on the outskirts of the Demonic Capital, Xenoskull.

The particular warehouse was once owned by a powerful merchant family, but it had long since been abandoned. It was never sold due to property damage here and there, as the costs were simply too much to make it worth it.

The man, clad in a black hooded cape, opened up a heavy metal door and entered the abandoned building.

Moonlight illuminated the room, shining in from a hole in the ceiling. The place was empty. Still, the light of the moon guided the man toward his contact. It was a man clad head to toe in black, one wearing an ornate mask.

“What’s going on here. We agreed not to meet after you had taken care of business, did we not? Or are you looking for work after what happened in Yulong?”

“...Isn’t there another target in the way?” The plump, hooded man waddled over toward the black-clad man. He grinned at the muffled question and pulled his hood down, exposing his fat face. He was a demonkin, or more specifically, a creature known as a mephisto. The easiest way to tell was his blue-white hair that glimmered in the dark.

“Well now... I’d certainly appreciate it if you removed the first prince, but what would you demand in turn? You want us to move weapons through the black market again?” After the man spoke, another voice bellowed out from behind him.

“...That’s it, huh? That was your deal? You gave Xenoahs weaponry to these Yulongese men, and hired their assassins in exchange?”

The fat little man turned around in search of the voice. His eyes bulged wide in horror when he realized who it came from.

“O-Overlord Zelgadi?!” The man staring him down was none other than the overlord of Xenoahs. Zelgadi von Xenoahs. It was at that moment I canceled **[Mirage],** revealing my true form.

“Wh-What the... You...?!”

“Eyes on me, devil boy. I arranged this. Now, let’s see... Severus Arnos, right? Seems your father is completely unaware of what you’ve been doing. When he found the letter and the mask, he had no idea what they meant.”

The plan was simple. I'd left two things near the possible suspects, in their bedrooms. A letter with this address and a note saying, "We need to talk about the last job," along with a black Yulongese mask. Then, I summoned various mice to keep watch on the reactions.

Everyone except this man either threw the stuff away, didn't understand the meaning, or yelled at people for pulling stupid pranks. Severus Arnos, on the other hand, walked right into it.

He immediately stashed the mask in a drawer and crumpled the letter into his pocket after reading it.

He was heir to the Arnos family. The merchant house that Second Prince Farese descended from. In other words, he was Farese's uncle. And so, he would eventually succeed the Arnos Merchant Corporation.

"Vermin... I cannot believe you were responsible. Your father is shamed by you! Your company, your legacy! Disgraced! Just who do you think you are?"

"Y-Your Vileness! You're surely mistaken! I had nothing to do with the death of the princess, I promise!"

"And who exactly mentioned death, I wonder? Who exactly mentioned the princess?"

Severus completely froze in his tracks. He'd slipped up. Only a few people knew about the situation with Sakura, and even fewer people knew about the assassination.

Severus had a lot to gain by killing her and securing the second prince's ascent. He'd be uncle to the overlord, after all. It'd be an enviable position, one few merchants ever found themselves in. He'd have the ability to interfere with political affairs. That was probably what he wanted, but there was no hope now.

Sirius and his elite guards charged into the warehouse. The day of reckoning had come.

“Arrest him. I’m fully entitled to pluck his eyes from his skull and skin him alive... but we’ll save the torture for when I question him.”

“Yes, Your Vileness! Secure the criminal!”

Severus offered no resistance as he was surrounded by rope and hogtied. Then, the soldiers dragged him off.

“So, we’re settled now?”

“Don’t be foolish, Grand Duke. Now the work truly begins. First, we need to make Farnese’s existence a matter of formal public record, lest the charges we levy against Severus mean nothing. However, Fiana and Farnese refuse to have anything to do with Xenoahs’ royalty, which is why we must immediately announce her divorce from my family as well.”

“Uh... Then, you mean...”

“Naturally, Grand Duke, we shall formally announce your engagement.” Sirius cut right to the chase.

Well... Crap. I mean, it makes sense but... I had no way out of the situation at all.

Touya used Escape Rope!

Professor Zelgadi: There’s a time and place for everything, but not now.

It kind of felt like that sort of thing, honestly.

“Uhm, well... I-I have a few fiancees already, so...”

“Hm? So? That’s not all that weird. I had two wives, myself. For men of status like us, what’s one or two brides?”

“Eight... I have eight others...”

“EIGHT?!” The overlord of Xenoahs froze in his tracks. Then, he suddenly planted both of his hands on my shoulders and forced a smile in my direction. His grip was... almost painful.

“My dear Grand Duke, let’s have ourselves a very detailed discussion, yes? We should be done by the morning. We’re going to be seeing a lot of each other in the future, so let’s get some sake and have a nice. Long. Chat.”

I was terrified. I tried to tell him I was a minor, but most countries treated fifteen as an acceptable age to drink. He agreed not to make me drink anything, but that didn’t make me feel any better. His eyes were screaming for blood.

Touya (very frantically) used Escape Rope (again)!

Professor Zelgadi: There’s a time and place for everything, but not now. Not ever.

I was done for.

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Ultimately, Sakura’s engagement to me was announced without a hitch. Her existence was brought to public knowledge as well.

Severus’ crimes were exposed at nearly the same time. The shock made the second prince’s grandfather, the head of the family, formally retire. He was succeeded by his youngest daughter’s husband.

In terms of Xenoahs’ laws, the entire family could’ve been condemned for the actions of the heir. However, the second prince took it upon himself to abandon the throne, so the family was spared as a result.

The second prince had no interest in becoming overlord anyway, and that might’ve actually been what spurred Severus into action. Speaking of him, Severus himself was consigned to the guillotine.

I brought Fiana and Sakura with me to Brunhild afterward. It was a really long trip, and I was really tired after talking things through with the overlord. I swear, he was a real noisy drunk.

Yumina and the others happily accepted Sakura, and were relieved when we all returned together.

“That means we’ve got all nine wives, huh? Guess there aren’t any more surprises to come.”

“I am glad that every one of you is so pleasant, I am.”

“Hm... But y’know, he could still take mistresses. Nothing was ever said about that.”

Elze, Yae, and Leen began chattering amongst themselves. *Please don’t talk about weird crap...*

Xenoahs was still isolationist, despite the engagement, but they did agree to send individuals over to Brunhild as a show of good faith.

There was discrimination against demonkin all over the world, but the envoys from Xenoahs would be able to work in Brunhild without any of that. I was a little worried about the overlord using the agreement as a convenient excuse to drop by whenever he wanted, though...

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“This is where I was planning on building the school.”

“It’s a good position. Not too far out of the town, so it’d be a good commute.” I was showing Fiana around the construction area. Old man Naito was there too, overseeing affairs, and Kougyoku was here to keep the peace.

“We’ll make a small schoolhouse to start, and then add to it from there. Ms. Fiana, you’re the sole teacher for the time being, so we don’t need to start with a large class in mind.”

“That’s fair. I’d like to start with around twenty students, though. I can handle that much, at least.”

Naito nodded toward Fiana while making note of the small details. This was a crucial step in granting the children of Brunhild more freedom.

Honestly though, I already had another school in mind. Namely, an Adventuring School. It was a facility where fledgling adventurers could come to hone their skills. This kind of education was a matter of life or death, and I definitely thought we should prioritize it.

I decided to talk with Guildmaster Relisha about establishing such a facility in Brunhild.

I waved to Fiana and Naito, then took my leave. The guild was busy as ever, since the dungeon conquest was still carrying on little by little. I was guided to Relisha’s office by the person working at the reception desk. And once there, I explained my plan to Relisha, and she went quiet for a while. Eventually, she spoke up.

“Sounds like an interesting idea... We’d need to think a bit more about what would actually be taught there, but I like it in theory. It should reduce the amount of pointless deaths, and retired veterans should be able to teach the next generation.”

“Plus, if a graduate from the school becomes a great adventurer, then that’s a solid endorsement of our effectiveness.”

“You’re right. Even if it’s a little costly, the results should speak for themselves. Shall we say a typical course runs between half a year and a year?” Relisha began to scrawl notes down on a pad as she spoke. She was already working out the overarching details, it seemed.

“We should divide the courses based on age and difficulty, as well. Let’s say one course is for people between the ages of thirteen and fifteen, one for sixteen to twenty, and then one for twenty and up.

We'd also need to teach differently based on who's experienced in adventuring and who isn't."

"Makes sense. Let's go with that, then." I nodded in approval at Relisha's suggestion. I mostly planned on the guild running the school anyway, so I wasn't going to do much beyond being the idea guy. The teachers and staff would be handled by the guild, too.

Only certain kinds of people would start adventuring after the age of twenty, at least in my opinion. It was likely for knights or soldiers to try their hand after retiring from army service, for example. Being an adventurer wasn't consistent work, but had high potential for riches.

"Very well, then. I'll propose this idea at the next meeting."

"Thanks a lot. Speak to Naito when we enter the actual planning stage." I was pretty relieved by how easily that had gone. There were a lot of things that could be taught in an adventuring school. Effective ways to fight magic beasts, standard things to take on an adventure, and so on.

Learning through experience was the norm in this world, but that meant a lot of people died due to simple mistakes. Knowledge was power, and equipping them with it before they ventured out would help humanity on a whole.

"Ah, that reminds me, Your Highness... You're engaged to a princess from Xenoahs now?"

"Guh... Word travels fast, huh?"

Cut me some slack! Well, I guess the guild wouldn't be the guild without its info network. This is crazy, though. I didn't think they'd have a source as far as Xenoahs. Although Fiana never married the overlord, so Sakura technically isn't a princess.

"Well, I have a small request."

"What do you need?"

Relisha was blunt. She wanted to open up a guild branch in Xenoahs. And she wanted me to help arrange it somehow... I wasn't really a fan of having to meet the overlord again, though.

That being said, if we could install a guild in Xenoahs, we'd have the ability to detect the Phrase over there.

It wasn't like they would avoid attacking Xenoahs, so this would be beneficial for all.

I accepted her request, but said to wait a bit, since I wanted to take Sakura too.

Eventually, I ended up taking both Sakura and Relisha for an audience with Overlord Zelgadi. It was approved easily, because I told Sakura to ask her dad directly.

Then, the overlord started talking for a while, but Sakura cut him off by calling him a bother, and he started sulking.

I looked at his depressed face and felt a little worried about having my own daughter in the future. Thinking that the cowering man before me could be me someday? Well... that was real terrifying.

I tried talking to Sakura about being a little nicer to him, but she just replied with, "I'm being as nice as I can be."

Women, man... Women are terrifying.

Chapter II: Babylon Rising

“Heh, that’s a unique way of using your divinity...” Moroha was looking over at me with crossed arms. Evidently, she was impressed.

I was currently in the middle of exerting my own divine power. The other Gods seemed to do it as easily as breathing, but using such power left a grave toll on my body.

Due to that, I started wondering if there was a way for me to draw out my power a little bit instead.

I concentrated on my arm, and gradually a blade composed of divinity shrouded the area up past my wrist.

I was practicing in a wooded area, far from prying eyes.

“We don’t usually have to suppress our power when we activate it, so I never thought about trying it that way.”

“Frankly I just don’t want to get another haircut soon...” I was honestly a little anxious about hair sprouting out of my arms, or a beard coming out of my face... So I was glad it worked out.

“It’s hard to maintain its form, though. I gotta focus.” There was effectively a beam saber extending from my arm, but as my focus waned, so too did the weapon.

“It’d probably be easier if you applied it to a held object.” Moroha tossed a twig over in my general direction.

I caught it in my hand and began to channel divinity through it. *Oh... Wow!* I managed it quickly. I didn’t have to concentrate so hard about maintaining it either.

I swung it around, and, with the finesse of the least dexterous man in the world, chopped down a tree with the twig. *... What the heck?! This thing’s stronger than a phrasium blade!*

I let go of the twig and picked up a nearby rock. I broke it into little bits with a squeeze of my empowered arm. Then I tried to crush another one with my de-powered arm. It hurt a bit, and obviously didn't work.

Hmph... My whole right hand is like it belongs to someone else. I decided to punch a nearby tree. Painlessly, my hand sank into the structure, cracking open a massive hole. The divine power wrapped around my arm had simple bored open a hole into the tree. I was pretty sure that if I kept pushing, the tree would keep relenting.

Divinity was never a power designed for use in mortal realms. That's why my sisters hadn't used it for anything other than dealing with the servile god. But I wasn't necessarily limited in that sense, so I thought I'd better get used to it.

Frankly I didn't want to have to use it. But I knew there were more Dominant Constructs like Gila around. That's why I needed it. Only that kind of strength seemed like a good enough countermeasure.

I headed back to find Sakura and Linze chattering in the courtyard. It was nice to see the two of them getting along so well. They had a lot in common. Both were quite shy, but in different ways. Linze was passive and more cowardly, while Sakura was generally just indifferent to stuff.

"What's up?"

"Ah. Grand Duke..."

"Ah, Touya... Sakura here told me she wanted to learn magic, so I was testing her magical aptitude." *That explains the spellstones over there... That's how I did it, back in the day.*

Demonkin typically didn't employ magic. It wasn't that they couldn't on a whole, it was just that they normally didn't. Their subspecies had evolved in such a way that specialized their bodies and made them less reliant on magic. Ogres, for example, were remarkably

powerful compared to a human. Alraunes could manipulate forests, and harpies could fly at great speeds.

From what I understood, this lack of magical usage actually made them less magically adept through the generations. I knew of some demonkin species that had no magic potential at all.

Sakura had never formally studied magic due to her age. She knew **[Teleport]** but didn't know how to control it. Even so, that meant she had Null aptitude at the very least.

"So, what are her elements?"

"Null, water, and darkness."

Oh my. Three? That's pretty good. Null magic is personal though, so she only really has two elements.

"She has a vast amount of magical power, too. Not quite as much as Leen, but definitely more than me." *Well, she's from the Overlord's lineage, that makes sense. I'm not surprised she has a lot... But I am surprised that Leen has more. Still, Leen was clan matriarch of the Fairies, so that's a given.*

"I can teach you water spells, Sakura. But the null magic is something you'll have to figure out yourself. As for darkness... Touya or Yumina should be able to help you out there." *Oh, right. Leen can't use darkness.*

In total, our magical aptitudes were:

Touya - All Attributes

Elze - Null (**[Boost]**)

Linze - Fire, Water, Light

Yumina - Earth, Wind, Dark

Yae - None

Lu - None

Sue - Light

Hilde - None

Sakura - Water, Dark, Null (**[Teleport]**)

Leen - Fire, Wind, Water, Earth, Light, Null (**[Program], [Transfer], [Protection]**)

And that was that.

Wait, didn't Leen mention she had four null spells? Guess she neglected to tell me one. If I remember right, every Fairy has at least one null spell.

"Hm? What's everyone up to?" They said speak of the devil and he shall come. That apparently applied to Leen. Paula was there too, wobbling along with a carefree gait.

Paula held her arm up in the air as if to say "What up!" She seemed full of energy... As full of energy an animated bear could be, anyway.

"Leen. You have four Null spells, right? I know the three obvious ones, but what's the other?" I asked what was on my mind right away. I doubted she had anything to hide.

"Oh, right. It's a spell that works a bit like your **[Search]** one. It's called **[Discovery]**." *Huh... Wonder what it does.*

"You use it while imagining an object, and you'll get a vague idea of where it is. Though if you can't picture the object clearly, you're not gonna get far."

"Huh. Sounds useful for finding stuff."

"Let's say I wanted to find an apple that I left laying around. I use the spell, right? But if someone came along and took a bite out of that apple, its image would've changed a bit too much for me to accurately locate." *Wow... It gets rendered useless that easily?* Apparently the spell didn't account for things changing form.

“In the case of apples specifically, it might also lead me to a similar-looking apple. So it’s pretty hard to find generic things. I only really use it to track Paula when she goes too far.” *Heh... Like tracking a lost kid. Sounds like a rough bit of magic, though.* If this was the old world it probably would’ve been used to find car keys or the TV remote. When you think about it like that, it sounds a lot more useful.

After that little mystery, we went back to prepping Sakura for a crash course in magic.

In the modern era, dark magic was synonymous with summoning magic.

Lizardmen, silver wolves, and countless other creatures could be drawn from the void and made to do the bidding of their summoner.

Kohaku and the others told me that most summoned beasts lived in another world that I decided to tentatively refer to as Beastworld. The Heavenly Beasts were called by chance every ten years or so, but they’d never been called by anyone tough enough to forge a contract before me.

My current hypothesis was that the magical beasts that roamed the world were likely offspring of summoned creatures from Beastworld.

If a silver wolf, for example, bred with a regular wolf, and then returned to its world... Then the offspring would be a completely different species. That was probably the root cause of such strange monsters. Summoning magic affecting the ecosystem.

I didn’t really have any way to prove that, though.

Dark magic also had other aspects to it.

“There are spells that mess with the mind like **[Confusion], [Sleep],** and **[Temptation].** These are offshoots of dark magic. Those spells were lost to time, but I’ve managed to revive them a little thanks to

the grimoires in the Babylon's library. They won't work on people with high magic power, though." Sakura looked at me with a disappointed face. *I knew it... She wanted to charm me! Truth be told I'm plenty charmed by her and the others already, but... Th-That's a little embarrassing to say out loud.*

"How about we try a test summoning?"

"Okay... I'd like to try that."

Sakura gave me a little nod. Leen taught her how to deal with the summoning while Linze and I drew out the magic circle in the courtyard. Paula helped, in the best way she could. *What a nice little bear.*

We finished the preparations and Leen helped Sakura pour her magic into the circle. Black mist began to pool around the summoning circle, gathering in the center.

"I wonder what we'll get..."

"I'm looking forward to seeing what Sakura can summon." Linze had picked up Paula and was holding her in a gentle embrace. The two of us whispered a bit. Sakura had an aptitude for music, so I wondered if she'd draw out a siren. It'd be nice if she could make a choir or something.

Gradually the mist abated, and a small, crouching shadow was all that remained. It stood up, thrust a blade into the sky, and... Began to yell.

"A cat that fights for the sake of mankind! Mankind that gives its lifeblood to a cat! The heavens cry! The earth cries! The cats cry! Bear witness to my kitty-cat chivalry! Meow!"

Long boots... A feathered hat... Gloves... A cape... A rapier... A little belt... It was a bipedal black cat. ...*What's with this little fella...?*

“It’s a cat sith. A summoned catbeast.”

“Don’t be kitten around! I’m a cat knight, got it?! A fur-midable, cathletic, cat knight!” The cat knight corrected Leen, and then began to make horrible cat-based puns. I hated it.

It wasn’t much larger than a regular cat. I honestly doubted its ability to fight. A talking summon was really rare, though...

“I wish to make a contract. Please tell me your terms.” Sakura turned toward the cat. He proceeded to remove his hat in an overdramatic fashion.

“Are you fur real, lass? You know, I’ve got a pretty good feline about you. In the old tails of yore, knights served purretty young ladies, no? You already have my sword!”

“What if a man summoned you?”

“I would pawsitively reject him! With my claws!” The cat knight answered me instantly. *Whew... And they said chivalry was dead.*

“You’ll be able to fulfill the contract if you give him a name.” Leen nudged Sakura, who then turned to me.

“A name... Grand Duke... Do you have any ideas?”

The cat knight, on the other hand, began waggling its finger in disapproval. It went all “Tsk, tsk, tsk...” on me. It was kind of annoying, actually.

“Let meow make one thing purrfectly clear. Paw-don my rudeness, but I can’t just be named by any old man. Despite my looks, you mustn’t furget that I am a cat of honor, a cat of integrity, a cat of-”

“...[Gate].”

I opened up a portal next to the cat knight, and out popped Kohaku.

He froze in place immediately, clearly terrified. His teeth began to chatter and his form began to shake. All the hair on his body stood on end.

“Y-Y-Y-You g-gotta be kitten me... Wh-Why is the White Monarch h-here?!”

“My liege. Who is this little cat?”

“He’s a little friend that Sakura summoned. I was thinking of giving him a name, but he doesn’t want me to name him.” Kohaku cast a glare toward the cat knight, causing him to prostrate himself and bow repeatedly.

“You object to being named by my master?”

“N-Now hold on! L-Let’s put this situation on paws! I’ll listen, sorry!” *Well, that was a quick one-eighty. What shall I call you...?*

“...Mr. Mittens.”

The cat looked absolutely mortified the moment that name passed my lips. He had quite a range of expression considering he was a cat.

“We could call you that, or... D’Artagnan. Which do you prefer?”

“I’ll take D’Artagnan!” The cat knight came out of the magic circle after Sakura named him, and he heaved a sigh. He was keeping his distance from Kohaku and me, but that was fairly understandable.

“So, Sakura. How much magic power is Mr. Mittens eating up right now?”

“Hm... Well... I think... Right now he won’t even last an hour, so quite a bit.”

“Are your ears full of hairballs?! I’m D’Artagnan! Not Mr. Mittens!”

Obviously I know it pisses you off, you cat brat! D’Artagnan’s a fine name, but you’re Mr. Mittens to me.

I took out a ring from my pocket and passed it over to Sakura. She took it without any hesitation.

“There’s magic power stored in this ring. You can use it to keep Mr. Mittens here manifested. It should be enough to last about half a year. Lemme know when it runs out, alright? I can recharge it immediately.”

“Alright. Thank you very much.”

“It’s D’Artagnan!” *Heheheh... He’s pretty funny, so I guess we can keep him. He could probably be like Spica and work as our bodyguard. I’ll toss him over to Moroha. Doesn’t really matter if he’s a human or not, we’ll rank him up into a super cat knight.*

As the cat fussed and whined, Paula gave him a gentle pet on the shoulder.

Just as I amused myself with the image of those two working together, Kougyoku appeared and perched on my arm.

“What the heck?! Even the Flame Monarch’s here too?! What a cat-astrophe...!” Kougyoku looked at Mr. Mittens for a moment, and then back at me. She began talking, completely ignoring him.

“My lord. We’ve found the final ruin, we believe.”

“For reals?!” *Holy cow, if it actually is a Babylon ruin, then that’ll be it... The research laboratory will be mine at last.*

After I discovered the storehouse I wasn’t as motivated to explore and find Babylon ruins. As far as I understood it though, the research laboratory was the place where Cesca and the other gynoids were born. It was supposed to have a bunch of experimental facilities.

Man, in the end I never found a single gynoid who wasn’t a hassle in some way... Well, whatever. Time to finish building my castle in the sky.

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There were two islands directly west of the Sea of Trees, just off the southwest coast of the Continent.

The larger of the two islands was called Egrand.

The smaller of the two was called Mallet. Combined, the two of them made up the territory of a single kingdom, Egret.

Egret didn't have anything that made it stick out at all. It was a lovely nation surrounded by water, so it was largely unspoiled and beautiful though.

The country didn't have much in the way of culture, and as a society they were behind most of the other nations. They did, however, have one thing other nations did not.

A Sea Serpent.

This great aquatic dragon lived around the shores of Egret, and was revered as a guardian of the islands. Around a hundred years ago, Sandora attempted an invasion of Egret. The legends say that this Sea Serpent sank the invading ships.

Another legend stated that if people saw the Sea Serpent, they were guaranteed a bountiful catch of fish.

"Have you heard of this Sea Serpent, Luli?"

"I have. It's one of my children, after all. It's the kind that enjoys the company of humans, so it's likely protecting the people of that island on purpose." I'd heard about the dragon, so I went to Egret with Luli in tow. She turned into a huge azure dragon, and I peacefully rode on her back all the way there. It was nice and comfy. I'd still deployed a shield though. The wind was a pain.

"Oh, I see it." There was a small landmass visible in the distance. That must've been the Kingdom of Egret.

"My liege. The Sea Serpent is here."

“Huh?” I looked down in response, and saw the face of a large dragon peeking out of the sea. It swam like a pro, causing waves to crash in its wake.

It was huge. Bigger than Luli, even. The sea was probably the perfect environment for it, since it would’ve taken care of most of its weight. That was probably why there were so many large things in the sea.

“It’s been some time, Sea Serpent.”

“It is wonderful to see you again, Azure Monarch. It is a pleasure to meet with you as well, Mochizuki Touya. Welcome to Egret.”

“You know me?”

“That I do. The incident upon Dragoness Island is known across our entire kind.” *Ah, that makes sense...* From what I understand, what I’d done was basically a ghost story at this point. We did end up slaughtering half the dragons there, after all. The only reason there wasn’t a grudge was because I had Luli on my side.

Dragons typically avoided fighting humans. They didn’t want to run the risk of humans seriously banding together for an offensive. The young dragons and their reckless behavior ended up causing a headache for a lot of people in the end. But ultimately the problem was that they hadn’t been taught how to behave properly.

“So you knew we’d be coming?”

“I heard about it from the Flame Monarch’s kin. The ruins you seek are within the depths of a cave that I’ve been sleeping in.”

“Aha, is that right? Then you’re going to show us the way?”

“It would be my pleasure.” The sea serpent began swaying side to side. We followed.

He headed toward the islands of Egret, and entered a relatively narrow cavern near Mallet’s bay. We followed afterward and ended up coming out into a wide open space.

It was basically like a secret base. I hopped off Luli's back and clambered around some slippery rocks.

"The ruins you seek are at the end of the cave, toward the back." I followed the serpent's motions, and nodded a little bit. It seemed pretty deep inside.

They had some catching up to do, so I left Luli and the sea serpent to talk with one another, pressing on alone.

The rocks were a little too wet and slippy for my liking. It was probably because of how high the tide rose depending on the time of day.

I kept on going until I found the object. A bona-fide sphere. At a glance, it looked like a pure black globe. Five meters or so in diameter. But on closer inspection, I saw the spellstones embedded in its side.

"Let's pour some magic in, then." I poured fire magic into the red spellstone. A red glow began to shine and spread across the surface of the globe, lighting up strange geometric patterns.

The light gradually ran around the sphere until it made a complete rotation and returned to the spellstone.

The blue, green, yellow, purple, and brown stones all reacted the same way. The white of the null stone joined the rest at the end, and caused the patterns to shift. A small entrance opened up.

I stepped inside and immediately saw a strange pattern drawn out on the ground. It was glowing in formation.

"The heck is this... What...?" The pattern was a series of square tiles. Each was separated from one another, and could be moved around freely.

A sliding puzzle. Clearly one that was meant to line up in a certain order.

[01][02][03][04]
[05][06][07][08]
[09][10][11][12]
[13][14][15][16]

It was kind of like one of those, but the space where the sixteenth would be was blank, and I had to slide all the pieces of the teleportation circle together to get it shaped up right.

It was likely that the puzzle would be complete when the teleportation sigil was matched up to its original form. Then it would probably activate or something.

The problem was the number of panels. I counted, and it was a ten by ten space. There were a hundred pieces in total. Except there were actually only ninety-nine because one of the pieces was missing to allow for sliding. It would've been better if they were actually numbered though, because making a picture without a reference was a huge pain in the ass.

"This sucks..." I sighed quietly and started sliding pieces on the ground.

My grandpa had given me a trick to this kind of sliding puzzle, though.

[01][02][03][04]
[05][06][07][08]
[09][10][11][12]
[13][14][15]

If they were lined up like this, then you just had to get them like this...

[01][02][03][04]
[05]
[09]
[13]

Then the ones on the outside... Could be aligned with their inner parts like this.

[06][07][08]
[10]
[14]

Then after that, it was just a matter of...

[11][12]
[15]

Just like that! No matter how large the puzzle was, it could be put together simply like that.

The problem was that this wasn't numbers, it was a picture. I couldn't confidently move them unless I knew which part was going to fit into the whole.

I wish I had a frame of reference...

I spent a long time fiddling with it. It was getting late, so I telepathically told Luli to head home.

Ninety-nine pieces was just tiring, really. It wasn't even a picture, it was a big old ground pattern. I had no idea of knowing if something was right until two parts lined up just right.

Either way, I continued the mundane task. Eventually, I somehow got it... And I was swallowed up by light.

I was sucked up into the usual swirling motion of light, and I saw the familiar sights of Babylon as I came to my senses.

I was a pure white building nestled in between some trees. It must've been the research laboratory.

As I went over to the building, someone came out and headed straight for me. It was the terminal gynoid of the research laboratory.

She had brown, triple-braided hair, and was walking pretty darned fast. She looked to be about two or so years younger than me.

"Mmh... Welcome to the research laboratory. I am the Terminal Gynoid and central manager here. My name is Atlantica, but you can call me Tica. Aah..." The girl was strange. Strangely polite. Her movements were swift and formal, like a business secretary. Her manners were extremely nice, too. She also spoke rather politely, too. Monica had warned me about her, but I figured it was just a case of contrasting personalities.

"Tica, is it? Nice to meet you. I'm..."

"Mochizuki Touya, mmh... Doctor Babylon has told me much."

"You heard about me from her?"

"Aah... Yes I did. She saw you visiting the garden and the research laboratory thanks to her foresight artifact." *Oh yeah, that thing was in the Storehouse... I tried to use it, but didn't get much out of it. It would only let me see someone with the same wavelength as me,*

and there wasn't anyone around in the future with all elemental attributes, apparently...

That basically meant that for the next five-thousand years, I was the last guy with every elemental affinity. Unless history changed, or something.

Not like it mattered all that much, Parshe smashed it to bits.

"How many pieces of Babylon have you acquired so far, Touya?"

"This is the last, actually. All the rest are docked together."

"Mmh... I-I see. Ah, that's more than enough to qualify then. The research laboratory is all yours. As am I." Tica pulled what appeared to be a slightly large cotton bud from her pocket and passed it over to me.

"Mmh... Please put this in your mouth." I held the swab in my mouth for a little while, just as instructed.

After she took it out, she put it into her own mouth.

"Mmh... Registration complete. Your genes have been stored, master. The ownership of I, Babylon Airframe Number Twenty-two, Atlantica... And the research laboratory, have now been transferred to you."

"Th-That's it?"

"Ah... Something wrong?"

"No, it's just... Forget it."

No kiss...? I mean, wait! It's not like I wanted a kiss! Right? Why do I feel disappointed?!

The girl seemed to be a bit more straight-laced than the others. I was glad to have a more sensible one hanging around.

"Well then, this way. Before I explain the facility to you, you have a mission."

“A... Mission?” Tica showed me inside the building.

The complex was divided into various buildings and facilities, each with a different purpose.

We entered the Primary Lab, apparently it was the place that Cesca and her sisters were all born.

There were a lot of objects lining the walls much like the ones in the Alchemy Lab. Some sleeping pods and capsules lined the walls, too. The tubes all seemed to be empty, save for the mysterious liquids that I couldn’t even begin to identify. Some of the tubes contained strange, flesh-like things floating in what was most likely formaldehyde. This was the definition of a creepy, suspicious lab.

The place kind of gave me the vibe of a human experiment freakshow... It definitely fit the aesthetic. I figured they probably had the capability to change the human body... Though in a sense they already had. Still, the gynoids weren’t exactly humans. They might as well have been, though.

Tica showed me to a cylindrical pod in the center of the room. She pointed toward a small window on a chamber that vaguely resembled a coffin.

A faint green light shone through the glass, and I could make out a girl’s face. She was floating in the tube with her eyes closed. She had long, beautiful hair. It was blonde. I couldn’t quite see all of her face, though. She vaguely resembled Tica in a sense, but there was something about her that reminded me of all the Babylon gynoids.

“This is...”

“The final Babylon Number, yes. Twenty-nine. Our littlest sister.” *Ten in total, then...? Wonder if she was abandoned mid-development or if she’s asleep for a reason, then.* Just as I was pondering, Tica dropped the bombshell on me.

“Mmh... This is our mother, Doctor Regina Babylon. I’d like for you to wake her up, aah...”

... You gotta be kidding me.

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“What do you mean... Doctor Babylon?”

“Mmh... In layman’s terms, this is a relatively fresh body with the Doctor’s original brain transplanted into it. The body and brain were then synchronized, and had their magic potential tuned properly. The process took a long time, but she’s still the Doctor. Ahh...”

Gross. So she’s not a clone, she’s a straight-up new body... With a brain jammed into it?! “But she looks like she’s ten... Why?” She had to have at least been in her twenties. The woman I saw on Cesca’s video message was that age. *Unless she went and fulfilled the dream of women everywhere... Eternal youth. Isn’t she a little too young, though?*

“If she’d been aged any further, there was a... Mmh... chance of magical rejection, and the tuning process could’ve failed. Her memories would’ve also been at risk, aahh...”

“...You jammed an adult brain into a kid’s head?”

“It’s there, yep. Whole thing. Mmh... Squished in with magic.” Tica squeezed her hand as if she was groping something soft. *I shouldn’t have asked. This is honestly freaking me out. Scientific sense just doesn’t apply to magic at all. I should’ve quit while I was ahead. Applying logic is fruitless here.*

I listened to the whole story, and apparently the Doctor didn’t pass away from old age, she had her brain shunted into the new body while she was still in the prime of her life.

The body of a Babylon Gynoid was much more durable than a human body, after all. Fam had been operating for five-thousand years

without a hitch, after all. It was almost like immortality. I wondered if she'd cultivated cells from elves or something.

"So what am I supposed to do?"

"Mmh... Just pump her full of magic energy to wake her up. You have the same biorhythm as she does, master... You'll be able to wake her up, surely. Aahh..." *Guh... What a pain. Wouldn't it be better if I kept her sleeping? This woman's gonna be a real pain and I know it.*

According to what I'd heard, genius or not, she was a grade-A pest. I had no idea what to do. If I woke her up, she'd likely get me in a ton of trouble. Surely it wouldn't be an issue if I kept her floating in there.

"Mmh... Sorry to bother you about it, but there isn't much time left, aah..."

"Huh?" I was deep in thought, but Tica quickly dragged me back to reality.

"What do you mean by that?"

"Mmh... Master, when you got here, a countdown started... Her capsule's life support started shutting down. I'd say that she has about five minutes before she finishes, er, is finished..."

"Wh-What the hell?! Why would something like that get installed?!"

"A-Aah... It was her choice. She, mmh, said that living on would be pointless if you never wanted to wake her up." *Oh that old hag! She knew I'd be reluctant so she put this in place! Gaaaah! I can't just let her die! She knows me way too well, this isn't fair. This kind of shit makes you wanna scream out "She played me like a damn fiddle!" I'll refrain, though.*

"...Where does my magic go?"

“Place your hand on this spellstone on the capsule, and slip your throbbing energy inside. Mmh...” I put my hand on the crystalline spellstone and started pouring magic into it.

After a while the machine began to clank and whir. The capsule began to open up like a clamshell, but it wasn’t quite exposed to air yet.

A strange liquid began pouring through the capsule. It sparkled and shone, but was ultimately drained away.

“Biorhythm, nominal. No issues with magical synchro. Bodily functions, also nominal...” Tica was fiddling with a control panel, pulling levers and pushing buttons. She pushed a huge button and the capsule finally popped open, the top of it sliding away cleanly.

A naked little girl, about ten years of age, exited the capsule. Her long golden hair flowed down to her waist. I didn’t feel the slightest bit turned on or anything. But that was normal, this was a literal child. Tica, on the other hand...

“...Why’re you breathing so heavily?”

“M-Mhh... Ohhh... Hhah... N-No reason, mh... D-Don’t worry about it!” The gynoid next to me was completely red in the face. Her breathing was going haywire, and blood was dripping from her nose.



Don't worry about it?! Of course I'll worry about it! You're no good too!

The little girl opened up her light green eyes. She then rubbed at them and started looking around. Eventually she noticed me, grinned broadly, and hopped down from the drained capsule.

"Nice to meetcha, Mochizuki Touya, Touya being your given name. I used my foresight to see you a lot in the future, so it doesn't really feel like I'm meeting you for the first time ever... Even so, howdy."

"You're... Seriously Doctor Babylon?" The young girl grinned maliciously as she spoke up again.

"In the young, nubile flesh. Doctor Regina Babylon. Foremost magitechnician of the Partheno Kingdom, scholar supreme, and your destined lover..."

"Nah, I'm good. Put some clothes on."

"The hell?! No need to be rude!" I already knew that if I reacted in exactly the way she wanted me to, I'd be playing into her hands and I'd probably die.

The doctor walked over to a nearby wall, pulled a white lab coat from the wall, and wore it loosely around her tiny form. It didn't have any buttons on the front, so her bare belly and... other extremities were on full display. She clearly had no shame.

I've heard of naked apron, but this is ridiculous... I sighed and shook my head. Even underwear would be better than this.

"Wearing that robe is pointless..."

"Ahh... N-No, I disagree!" Tica flashed a thumbs-up as blood spurted from her nose. *What the hell?! Why's she acting like that?!*

"Doc, what's wrong with Tica?"

"Ah, Atlantica just has a thing for little girls."

“...Don’t say something so horrible so casually.” That probably explained why she didn’t kiss me like the others had.

“I quite like them too.”

“Too much info, hag!” I was truly facing down the root of all evil. The base for all the impure Babylon Gynoids I’d faced so far.

“This is a bother... I didn’t have clothing prepared for a body this size. It’s not like me to be so lacking in foresight...” I considered going back to the castle to borrow from Renne or Sue. But I didn’t want to be scorned by asking for their clothes. Asking for their underwear was out of the question. I’d probably have to come clean with them about what was going on.

“Don’t tell me that coat’s five-thousand years old too...”

“Sure is. Problem? I enchanted it with a protective spell, so it’s always clean.” *No wonder it looks so new... My coat’s enchanted with* ***[Protection]*** *too, so it never needs cleaning.*

Still, the key issue here was that she was still completely bare about the front. I removed my belt and wrapped it around her, forcing the oversized thing to cover her body like a makeshift yukata.

I decided to have the research laboratory head in Brunhild’s direction.

Tica activated the monolith and set the course. I wanted her to wipe her stupid bleeding face.

“This body’s not bad, honestly... Surprisingly agile. It’s regrettable that I won’t grow any more, but I suppose it’s a fair trade for longevity.”

“Hm? You won’t grow any more?”

“This body is composed of tissue from various... Voluntary donors. It only grows for as long as I remain within the capsule, and once I’m freed, it won’t grow any longer. Atlantica has had that body of hers

for a long time, you know?" That certainly made sense. Tica and the other gynoids would keep their looks until they died, if they even did die... That trait made them similar to elves and dwarves. They couldn't have children either, as their bodies didn't account for reproductive function.

"Now, whenever I looked at the future, your movements were fairly erratic. I didn't get to see much of your life consistently. But what I'm most interested in is that artifact you carry."

"Uhh, artifact? What do you mean?"

"It's a small, black device. A communication device, but also a multimedia display. A... Smoffo, you called it?"

"Oh, you mean my smartphone." I took out my smartphone and showed it to Doctor Babylon.

"Yeah, that's the one! I tried making one of my own but I didn't understand the fine details. Mind if I borrow it a while?"

"I guess that's fine. Just don't break it." I'd put a lot of enchantments on it so I was fairly certain it wasn't gonna break easily. It'd be bad if she messed around and changed the settings, though.

She probably understood the basic functions already. After all, she'd already made a cable that could interface with Cesca. I wondered if she was interested in the technological aspects of it.

"Hm... These letters and images are most unusual... H-Hm... And it's operated by touch? Fascinating. What country are these letters from?"

"Japan."

"Japang? Er, Japan? Never heard of it. Is it a place that exists in this era? Were you born there?"

"Ah... Fine, you're right... I guess it's gone on long enough. I've been wanting to tell everyone for a while anyway."

“Huh?”

Doctor Babylon looked at me with a raised eyebrow.

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“Good grief, you mean to say that this child is Doctor Babylon herself...?” Leen was just as surprised as I was. Elze and Yae were also perturbed as they watched the little girl quickly find herself surrounded by the Babylon gynoids.

“Well... I guess this is par for the course.”

“I suppose this is not impossible, it is not.” Linze, Hilde, and Lu nodded in quiet acceptance.

The Doctor was talking with Rosetta, Flora, and Cesca. She’d borrowed some clothing from Sue, and basically just looked like a normal kid.

Tica had Monica locked in a deathgrip on the sofa. She wouldn’t let go. There were blood-dyed tissues stuffed up her nose, and her cheeks were bright red.

“Release me, damn it! Like, get offa me!”

“Oohohohoho...” I understood now what Monica had meant when she said she didn’t do so well with the research laboratory’s gynoid. Tica’s... petite fixation was definitely bad news for the small-framed Monica. Sue was so freaked out that she was clinging to my side for dear life.

I had all the Babylon gynoids, along with my fiancees, gathered in a room in the castle. Noel was sitting in the corner with her head on Liora’s lap. She was out cold.

Did I even have to bring her over...?

There were a lot of them, though...

Francesca of the hanging garden.

High Rosetta of the workshop.

Bell Flora of the alchemy lab.

Fredmonica of the hangar.

Preliora of the rampart.

Pamela Noel of the tower.

Irisfam of the library.

Lileleparshe of the storehouse.

Atlantica of the research laboratory.

And finally, Doctor Babylon herself...

It was quite the gathering... Fam, Noel, and Liora didn't come to the ground all that often, though.

Monica and Rosetta were focused on their work, so they mostly stayed up stairs too.

I also asked Parshe to stay up there if possible. I didn't want her causing an international incident with her clumsiness.

I watched Tica squeeze Monica, and decided it'd be for the best if she didn't come to the ground very often either. I wouldn't want Renne to get traumatized or anything.

"Well, Touya. What did you gather us for?" Yumina squeezed herself between me and Sue, and asked me a question.

"Well... The Doctor asked me about this, really. But I want everyone to know the truth. It's about what I've been keeping from you all up to now." Everyone suddenly stared at me. I stood up, steeled my heart, and took a deep breath.

"Look... The only reason I didn't mention this before is because I was scared I wouldn't be believed. I didn't even know if I should tell you. But I'm going to be living with you all for the rest of my life, so you

deserve to know the full truth about me.” I used my Smartphone to project a series of images on the wall. I scrolled through various clips on a video, showing images of London, Paris, Washington, New York, Jakarta, Bangkok, New Delhi, Beijing, Moscow, and last but not least, Tokyo.

Everyone was at a complete loss for words.

“What I’m showing you here is my former world. These locations are all on a planet called Earth. I was born there, and then I came here.”

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I told everyone about the person I was before I came to this world.

I told them about the nation named Japan, the planet named Earth. My life as a student, and the fact that I couldn’t return to that life.

It seemed like the invasion of the Phrase helped them process the idea of something being from another world, and the fact that other worlds than their own existed.

“Is that right... I always thought you were quite unusual, Touya... but this is quite unexpected.”

“Another world... I could never have even begun to guess, I could not.” Yumina and Yae both exhaled heavily and let their shock be known.

“Ah, then... what about Karen and Moroha?”

“Well, you might’ve guessed by now, but they’re not my blood-related sisters. But they’re my sisters all the same, my family in this world. There are others I’d consider the same way, too.” I promptly and honestly answered Linze’s question. I’d awoken to my divinity, after all. It probably meant I’d be considered ‘related’ to most of the gods. I was directly linked to God Almighty, after all.

I decided to hide the truth of the God situation and the real identities of my sisters. I didn't want people depending on the Gods instead of fighting with their own power, and that information was secret to begin with. I decided to tell them after getting permission later on. Plus, unloading information about being a literal God would've been a lot to swallow along with the other world stuff.

If I called down the old man, they'd likely believe it... It worked with the pope, after all. But asking him over for something like that felt a little bit trivial for someone so almighty.

"Then... guns, and bicycles... They're inventions from the world you came from?"

"They are. They're fairly normal in my world. Ah, well. There weren't really many guns in the country I lived in, though." I quickly corrected my response to Lu's questions. I didn't want her to think that shooting guns was a regular thing where I came from.

"Well... origins aside, it doesn't really change anything about you, right?"

"That's right. It doesn't change a thing about our love for Touya..."

"If anything, I'm a little mad he didn't think to mention it sooner!" Leen, Hilde, and Elze all came to their own conclusions. Their expressions seemed oddly calm, like they weren't hiding anything. It seemed like they didn't care all that much that I was a man from another world.

"Touya's Touya at the end of the day. I'm glad you thought to tell us, though."

"Me too."

"Thanks Sue... And you too, Sakura." I was happy they were so accepting of me. I thought that they might be creeped out, if not outright disgusted. After all, I was effectively an 'invader' from

another world. I thought they might come to a conclusion that matched me up as something similar to the Phrase.

“Most incredible!” The little doc in the corner suddenly let out a yell. Shivers ran up our collective spines. *D-Don’t call out like that!* “A man from another world! Such technology, such culture! Unseen knowledge, unlived histories! There’s simply nothing more mentally arousing! Not at all! Take me, Touya! Marry me!”

“NO WAY!” *Whoa...* All of my fiancees screamed their rejection in unison. They all strafed me from all sides, circling as if to protect me. It was frightening... But I could understand their stance, they didn’t anticipate any other brides, after all.

“That’s fine, then. I’ll be a concubine. My body doesn’t ovulate, so he couldn’t knock me up anyway. Sound good?”

“OKAY!”

“Wait what?!” I nearly broke my neck at the double-take I had to perform. *What the hell?! Don’t approve her as a mistress, stop that! You’re not supposed to be okay with that!*

“We decided that we don’t want any more wives for a fairly simple set of reasons. Firstly, we don’t want royal families from around the world trying to pawn off their daughters on to you, Touya.”

“We also don’t want to create a succession crisis. That’s why we can easily differentiate brides from concubines, it won’t cause a national incident.” Yumina and Leen explained the situation as best as they could, but I didn’t really get it all that much. I just didn’t understand this whole polygamy business on a fundamental level.

Still, it was better than them fighting amongst themselves. I didn’t want them trying to lay claim to me like “Back off, bitch! He’s mine!” or something... Although maybe being so aggressively pined for wouldn’t be so bad, either. That being said, it just meant they clearly understood that love wasn’t the same as possession or obsession.

“Alright! Wife permission obtained! Looks like we’re gonna be one big happy family, hm? Oh, and don’t worry about who’ll succeed the throne or anything. All your children are girls except one.”

“WHAT?!” *Whoa, whoa! Talk about a major spoiler leak! What the hell are you doing?!*

“Y-You mean to tell us that you are being truthful, you are?!”

“Damn straight, my little eastern angel. It’s not a huge deal, I just happened to overhear a conversation while peeping at the future once. It went something along the lines of ‘All nine queens have given birth, but this country only has one prince.’ Or something like that, I guess.”

Huh, wow. So that means one of these girls will bear a son... and the others will have daughters? I kind of feel like I just got spoiled on my own fate. This is a little lame... Hmph... At least eight daughters, then... I’m kind of worried about that. Am I gonna be able to relax at all as a dad?

It was, of course, entirely possible that a second son could be born after the point that the Doctor had seen, but I wondered if I’d want to have ten kids. There were gonna be way too many. Even nine would be too many, though...

Tokugawa Ieyasu had sixteen or so children, and Cao Cao apparently had twenty-five... Well, the Tokugawa house ended up having an obscene amount of successors, anyway.

But having too many children certainly played its part in the downfall of his Shogunate. It certainly placed a financial burden on the place. If you asked me, I’d say he had a little too much fun.

“Hmph... This situation’s going to be something interesting, isn’t it?”

“What’s that supposed to mean, Leen?”

“Isn’t it obvious? Those daughters will surely marry someday. As princesses of Brunhild, they’ll likely mingle with royals from other nations. It’s likely that by the end of all this, Touya’s blood will be in every royal family on the continent.”

“Oh, I see... Our family will probably spread out far, then. Our grandchildren may end up being the kings of each nation... This is... something, yes.”

Leen and Hilde were chattering away, but I decided to purposefully tune it out. *Our kids aren’t even born yet, don’t talk about them getting married off!*

“Hey, c’mon! We’re family now, right? Out with it! Tell me your otherworldly secrets! What’s with those big buildings?! What are those mysterious lights with three colors?! What’s that metal box thing? Does it move with magic?!”

“Hey, hey! Slow down already... I can’t answer if you spit all your questions out to me at the same time. I don’t know the ins and outs of stuff, either. The tall buildings are multi-level apartment buildings. Those three-colored signs are traffic lights. That metal box is a train, and it doesn’t run on magic. I don’t really know how they’re made, though. I also don’t know how they all work.” I stammered out my response as the insane doctor lunged towards me. She probably had more questions than I had time.

“I see... Mmm... If only I could figure out more information from that world!” She sighed slightly as she looked at the images projected in the air. *...Ah.*

“Look, if it’s information you want, I can give you it. I can get anything from the internet. You might even be able to understand stuff that I don’t know, doc. But, still...”

“What?! Tell me about it! If there’s a way to get the information then I gotta know about it!” I was a little apprehensive about giving her

that kind of info. If she got a lot of knowledge and tried to make a nuke or something... That wouldn't be good. The union of this world's magic and my world's tech could create something remarkably dangerous, after all.

"My old world has a lot of unbelievably dangerous knowledge. Two world wars already occurred there, and if a third one happened the entire planet would probably end due to the current weaponry we have. I don't know if I want to equip you with that kind of knowledge." Albert Einstein had said something wise about it.

He said "I do not know with what weapons World War III will be fought, but World War IV will be fought with sticks and stones." If a third World War happened, then the world would surely end. It was a message with a warning about the future.

"I see... That's a justified fear, indeed. I can't promise I wouldn't abuse that knowledge, either... So why don't you give me cultural knowledge for now instead? Myths, legends, history, and so on."

"Hm, good idea. Alright then. How about we watch some movies?"

"Movies?" *Earth stories, huh...? I shouldn't give her anything too fictional, then. Otherwise it'll just be a fantasy showing.*

What about a historical drama, then... Something from the Three Kingdoms? King Arthur, maybe? The Chushingura? Or hell, maybe a more modern soap opera might be good if they wanna know how society works...

The movies and shows I'd let them see so far didn't have too much that would give away the society they were made in, but at this point I didn't really have any reason to hold back.

If I want them to understand Japan, then this movie should be good... Otoko wa Tsurai yo, It's Tough Being a Man. That would do nicely.

I made my smartphone project the movie into the air, and we all settled down.

After that, I showed them a lot of Japanese and western movies. They got a better understanding of Earth thanks to that.

“So this is bothering me a little... That device you have, Touya. Does everyone in your old world actually have one of those?” Doctor Babylon was pointing at my smartphone. She certainly had taken a liking to it. *Oh right, there were some in a couple of the movies.*

“The one I’m carrying is different to the standard ones in my old world. I’ve enchanted it a lot since coming here, after all. It was originally created as a communications device, capable of talking over long distances, recording events, and other utility features.”

“Hmm... Can I please analyze it a little bit? I’m wondering about replicating it and distributing the results to others.” *Hmm... It’d be pretty convenient if everyone had one for communication, I guess. If we worked magic into it, we wouldn’t need phone networks or anything. Plus she already made radio-wave communication in the Frame Gears, right? If anyone can do it, it’d be her.*

Only my smartphone would be able to connect to the internet of my old world, anyways. I didn’t see the harm in letting her try.

“So, can I borrow it a little?” The Doctor took my smartphone into her hands and began to focus magic energy in the hand that was holding it. I had no idea what she was doing. **“[Analyze].”** A small light came from her palm and flowed into the phone. It must have been some kind of Null magic.

“Hoh... Interesting. I see, I see. I know how it works now. We should be able to make something like this with materials in our world, but there’s a small issue...” I took back the smartphone and looked it over. The Doctor started muttering and complaining about something, though.

I was actually curious about that spell, though, so I tried it myself.

“[Analyze].” *Whoa, whoa! What the heck?!* Design schematics and annotated information began flowing through my mind. I understood the construction of a smartphone, where every part went, what every part did. It was an incredible, suddenly enlightening experience.

I also knew all the materials that went into the construction of a smartphone. *Aluminosilicate... What’s that, anyway?* I wondered if in the Doctor’s case, the materials had been translated into something she could understand.

Either way, she had an incredible analysis spell. If I used it on a human, it would probably make me the equivalent of a walking MRI scanner. It’d be extremely useful magic for a doctor, though I’m not entirely sure having full knowledge of someone’s innards would be a good thing...

“Well, whatever! I’ll manage one way or another! I might not be able to make the exact same thing, but I can definitely make something along those lines! Come, Rosetta! To the Workshop!”

“I wouldn’t mind, ma’am! But you can’t order me around anymore! Touya’s my master, yessir! So he has to give you permission...”

“Hmm? Oh, right. Touya, may I borrow Rosetta?” I certainly didn’t mind, so the two of them left in a hurry. Rosetta seemed especially keen to get back.

“They’ll probably hole themselves up in there for a while now.”

“Indeed, she hasn’t changed at all. In fact her current body will probably be even harder to stop. With her endurance and lack of need to sleep, she will indeedily become a most industrious force.” Cesca and Liora let out little sighs.

Hm... I hope they don't overdo it. They better end up okay. Mass producing smartphones would certainly change the playing field, but I hope she doesn't add anything weird to it.

When I voiced those concerns to Cesca, she just stared at me blankly and pointed at my phone.

"The only one who's added reckless and unusual things to their device is you, master."

She was right, honestly.

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"Touya... What is this?" Every member of the alliance was staring at the thing I'd handed to them.

It was a little larger than mine, and it was white. That made it pretty easy to differentiate from the original.

"This looks somewhat similar to the artifact you have, Touya, but..."

"That's right. It's called a smartphone, but you guys can just refer to it as a phone if that's easier. The ones I've distributed to you all are a basic edition, somewhat inferior to mine." I began to explain the situation to the king of Lihnea.

"Press the button on the upper right, and it should start up. Give it a go."

"Whoa?! Something happened?!"

"Small images...? Hm...? This display is curious..." I was relieved to see they all worked fine. The interface had also been translated into the written language used commonly in this world.

"If you look at the top, you'll be able to see the time, and the battery- er, magic power. If it goes down to 0%, it'll switch off and be rendered useless. But even if it turns off, you just need to pour some

magic into it to charge it back up.” I scrolled down my contacts list and chose “Emperor of Regulus,” then opted to make a call.

“Eh?!” The ringtone suddenly started playing, and the emperor was so surprised he ended up dropping his phone.

Everyone stared over, and some of the people had stood up in shock.

“Don’t worry. This is a phone call. It’s a means of contact. Emperor, can you tell me what it says on the screen?”

“Y-Yes I can. It says Grand Duke of Brunhild.”

“So, the image displayed is who’s attempting to talk to you. Try touching the green button underneath the name, and put the phone up to your ear.”

The emperor very cautiously touched his finger to the screen, and the call picked up.

“Hey, hey. Can you hear me?”

“Ooh! I can hear your voice in my ear, Grand Duke! So this is how it’s used for communication?” Everyone was familiar with the Frame Gear’s comms network, so they were fast to grasp how it worked.

“Touch the button that says Contacts on your phones, it should show a list of names. If you touch a name, it’ll contact that person. Let’s try contacting the people sitting opposite us, as a test.” It started to feel like a technology session for the elderly.

After that I slowly taught the rulers of each nation how to use their phones.

There weren’t a lot of apps installed on their devices though. It looked like a smartphone on the outside, but on the inside it was Babylon’s derived design.

I installed the phone, the camera, map and compass, calculator, personal notes, clock, texting, flashlight, calendar, and basic game apps on each. That seemed enough to me.

The maps didn't really give them the edge that my **[Search]** did, so their phones were inferior to mine. They could still use it to find their current location and nearby landmarks though.

They looked like children with brand new toys, every ruler was eagerly playing around with their phones. They were texting and calling each other gleefully, but eventually I had to get them to settle down.

"I've told you all you need to know, and these phones are yours now. But if you lose it, or if it's stolen, let me know. I should be able to recall it for you."

"My my, this is rather impressive... Won't international communications become trivial with this?" Doge Audrey looked over her phone with a satisfied expression on her face as she spoke.

"Touya. I've been curious... This application here, the one called Games. What is that, exactly?"

"Ah, right. Consider this a little trial. There are a few games and activities installed in that app. You can connect to others to play Shogi with them in two-player sessions. Connecting four will let you play Mahjong with them over long distances, too."

"OOOH!!" The four old men from Belfast, Mismede, Regulus, and Refreese all cheered in excitement. That was only natural, given their inclinations.

"However, I've placed a limit of two hours per day on this app."

"NOOO!!" *Don't give me that! It's important. You guys'll just keep playing forever. If you guys just game all day instead of doing your*

jobs then there'll be a political crisis! I'd have to apologize to your nations.

I believed that allowing them to text and call each other would deepen the bonds between nations, so I had high hopes for the new communications functionality.

"If you take pictures using the camera app, I'll be able to print them out for you, so let me know if that ever becomes necessary." I showed them all a photo of Karen that I'd printed earlier as an example. The king of Belfast rose from his seat right away.

"...I must return home. I need to take a picture of my little Yamato at once!" He was a crazily doting dad as usual...

Things were wrapping up, so I decided to call the meeting to a close for the day. Her Holiness the Pope decided to come up to me after the meeting. "Ah, uhm... are there any pictures of Lady Moroha? If there are, I would like to have two copies printed out!" *Hm... I wonder if that's quite alright... Ah well, I suppose you're a devout enough lady.*

After the meeting wrapped up, I received a phone call. It wasn't from one of the world leaders, though. The only words on my screen were 'Doctor.' Service was never an issue, as she'd engineered the phones to connect based on the magic in the atmosphere instead of electromagnetic signals. Apparently such a thing was a trivial technology during the renaissance in which Doctor Babylon had been born into.

"'Sup."

"Yo, Touya? What's 'Sup' mean? Supper or something?"

"Oh, it's just a basic greeting from my old world. It's like a contraction of "What's up?" So you usually expect the other person to say something next." *That's how I understand it, at least. I never really thought about it too deeply.*

“Ooh, I see. Anyway, how did the world leaders react to their phones?”

“Very well. Everyone took them back happily.”

“That’s wonderful news. But I’m disappointed you gave them such a neutered edition of my master work.”

“The first version you showed me was way too complex! Who the hell needs a self-destruct function for a phone anyway?” She’d added way too many stupid things to the original build, like a supersonic frequency generator that could shatter glass, and a camera that could see through walls or clothes. All kinds of weird crap like that.

I wasn’t too surprised though, Doctor Babylon was a weirdo. The saying “There is a fine line between a genius and an idiot” flashed through my mind a little.

“Ah well, no worries. Oh, right. The new Frame Gear that Rosetta and Monica are so busy with... How about you let them focus on that, and let me focus on making the Frame Gears for Leeny and Linzey?”

“Oh, sure... I was thinking they’d both be more attuned to magic, but the Phrase are resistant to magic. So I was thinking of something that would take advantage of the Fragarach system, or magical defenses.”

“That’s a good idea. Were you thinking of employing the Satellite Orbs? Are you thinking of weapons based on stuff from Earth?”

“I guess.” *Well, more like based on anime from Earth.* I kept quiet about that part because I didn’t want that dastardly doc knowing about that stuff too. I didn’t want her trying to make an extravagant space battleship or something.

After I put down the call from the doctor, I got another call from Sakura. I wondered what she wanted. “‘Sup.”

“Ah, uhm... ‘Sup. Grand Duke, is it alright to talk?”

“It’s fine. Is something bothering you?”

“Ah, well. My mother wants to talk about the school.”

“Fiana? Alright.” Fiana was scheduled to work at the upcoming Brunhild school, which was about eighty percent complete. We decided to run it as a test to begin with, and add more buildings as more students showed up.

“Where’s Fiana right now?”

“She’s with me at the school site.”

“I’ll be over in a second.” I dropped the call and opened up a **[Gate]** to the schoolgrounds. I saw Fiana and Sakura once I got there, along with old man Naito and Mr. Mittens.

“Ah, Touya. Sorry for calling you here so suddenly.”

“Not an issue. What’s wrong?”

Fiana gently bowed her head. I wondered what had happened.

“Uhm, well. I spoke to a lot of families when we first started discussing, but word spread faster than I expected it to... There are a lot of people who want to get their children an education. More than I can actually handle at this point...”

“Huh? How many?” I turned to Naito and asked him for hard numbers.

“Almost eighty prospective students in total.”

“What? I didn’t even know there were that many kids in Brunhild.”

“We’ve had more immigrants lately. Retired adventurers, land workers, merchants, builders... They’ve brought children with them too.” That made sense. Not everyone was single, after all. Entire families had moved in.

I'd originally only planned for about twenty or so students. The projected number now was four times that much.

"Alright, then. Should we get one or two more teachers brought in?"

"That would be wonderful. I'd truly appreciate the support." Fiana let out a small sigh of relief. *More work for me... Guess I'll have to conduct some interviews.*

I needed to tell Kousaka about the new staff I'd be calling in. I also needed to have Naito extend the buildings to accommodate the new numbers.

I turned my attention to another matter.

"What're you doing, Mr. Mittens?"

"It's D'Artagnan! Purrlease remember that! Naturally I'm guarding the meowther of my venerable lady!"

"Heh..." Mr. Mittens puffed out his chest pridefully. I thought for a moment that Sakura might have assigned him to the job since he was a pain, but I didn't feel like hurting his feelings too badly. He was probably happy to be doing a good job anyway.

"D'Artagnan is really useful, he's a lovely kitty."

"Ah, venerable meowther... You call me by my pawsitively proper name... Even milady was calling me that cursed name..."

"It's easier to say, that's all."

Sakura answered with a nonchalant shrug. It seemed like Mr. Mittens had taken quite a liking to Fiana.

The problem had been sorted out, so I decided to drop by the Silver Moon for lunch. I decided to go with Sakura and Fiana.

Just as I was about to invite them, my phone started vibrating again. *Huh? Who is it?* I checked the screen, and it was Kousaka.

“Milord. Please return to the castle via one of your **[Gate]** spells. There are various documents that require your approval.”

“Ugh...” *I should never have given out these phones...*

I felt a lot of pressure all of a sudden. Or it was more like the reality of my situation was now within closer sight.

I sighed and walked through my portal, internally grumbling about the problems of easy contact.

Chapter III: Daydream Believer

As the world leaders got used to their smartphones, they realized just how useful a tool it actually was.

As far as foreigners went, I handed them out to leaders associated with my alliance. In Brunhild, my fiancees received one each, and the Babylon Gynoids all got one as well. Along with Karen, Moroha, the former Takeda Elite Four, the Knight Commander and Vice-Commanders, Laim and Micah from the Silver Moon.

I also made sure that their contact addresses only had people they were familiar with in them. I didn't give Micah the king of Belfast's number, for example. She had mine, though. Otherwise, the highest rank in her phonebook was Lain.

She'd be able to register the king's number if he personally told her it, though. But I didn't want just anyone having a direct line to a national leader.

There were some unintended negative consequences to my introduction of smartphones, though. People would just send texts or make calls for every little thing.

The novelty wasn't lost on them, so they were using it as much as they could. I could understand how they felt, though. They'd likely calm down after a while, so it was fine.

"This is... tremendous... It's even better than the artifact I currently use for communication. Are you saying I can truly have this?"

"Yup, I am." I explained the general functions of the phone to Guildmaster Relisha, and then handed it over to her. I'd come to the guild on important business.

Relisha had made some tea, so I was drinking it down. It was a little different to the usual kind, but it tasted great. Relisha had a

preference for black tea. She had a large variety of tea leaves on her office shelves.

“How’s the Phrase situation looking?”

“Two Lesser Constructs in Hannock last week. They were taken out by a party of Red-ranks. It’s the third emergence this month. They’ve been appearing a little more frequently lately.” She wasn’t wrong. It seemed like the boundary of the world was being torn at again. It was good that the ripped areas weren’t too close together, though. If they connected up, then the tears would become even larger.

If that happened, then they’d open up to the point where Upper Constructs and Dominant Constructs could come out. That wouldn’t be good.

Our options were limited for the time being. We had a few courses of action, however.

Method One: All-out Phrase Purge

This one was a little extreme. I didn’t know how many Phrase existed on the other side, after all. There’d also be massive loss of life on humanity’s front.

Method Two: Phrase Diplomacy

Only the Dominant Constructs seemed capable of intelligent speech. I didn’t think talking with them would do much though, they clearly wanted us dead. Even if I’d only encountered a couple, the two Dominant Constructs I’d met so far were volatile and dangerous individuals.

Method Three: Take the Sovereign Core, and Push it Somewhere Else

The world would definitely survive if we sent on the Sovereign to the next world, but I wouldn’t feel comfortable with the ramifications. I’d be putting the crisis on another society instead. I also had no idea

how to do that. It wasn't like I could just ask God Almighty for advice, either. He had a firm policy of non-interference.

Method Four: Destroy the Sovereign

That would make Ende my enemy. I wasn't keen on that. Plus I had a feeling that the Sovereign itself wouldn't go out without a fight. I didn't want it to wake up and for things to get really bad.

Method Five: Repair the World Boundary

I had no idea how to do that.

Each option I had was inconclusive. Realistically, method one would be the best for tangible progress. Method two would be my default if I met another Dominant, but even then...

"Oh, right. Got some news out of Yulong. There's a new heavenly emperor marching around."

"What, again?" *How many self-proclaimed rulers can one country even have?* Ever since the old one died, there's been a new heavenly emperor popping up in every major city. It made the broken remains of the country like a collection of competing city-states.

"Well, this guy's pretty serious, apparently. He's waged a war against all the other self-proclaimed leaders and slaughtered them. He's been pretty brutal in his means so far."

"How so?"

"He's ruthless. Bribery, assassination, he even had one of the homes of his competitors blown up. The biggest threat though? His Steel Battalion."

"Steel Battalion?" I frowned as I heard Relisha's words. I had some suspicions.

“Just as the name suggests, it’s a force of steel soldiers that operate autonomously. We currently believe they must be based on the Frame Gears, or some form of plagiarism.”

“I knew it...” I figured the stolen Frame Gear parts would come into play at some point. But they’d managed it sooner than I expected. They must have had serious technological or financial backing.

And that probably meant, though I was assuming here... Gordian, the Golden Order, had stolen our parts, created the Iron Soldiers by reverse-engineering the tech, and brought it over to the new self-proclaimed heavenly emperor in Yulong. The Golden Order had members ranging from merchants to scholars, after all, they probably had many contacts.

Hell, it was even possible that this new emperor was a member of the organization too. I didn’t really think he was a blood relative of the previous guy anyway.

“Tell me more about it? How similar to a Frame Gear is it?”

“Ah, sure. There’s definitely a resemblance. Look here, one of our guild members sketched one. Here, this one.” Relisha passed me a slip of paper from the huge pile on her desk.

“Mm, I see... There’s definitely a resemblance.” The image depicted a metal giant with long arms and stubby legs, it was fairly short but made up for that with how broad it was. It had a short neck too, and generally looked somewhat malformed. It definitely looked durable and stable, though. *Hm... So this is one of his Steel Battalion...*

It sure looks like a Frame Gear... No idea how it’ll actually fare in battle though.

“And how many of these things are there?”

“There isn’t an exact number, but our guild report states around one-hundred exist. He used these machines to attack the other

independent cities, and succeeded in no time at all.” That made sense, there was no way a normal soldier could fare against mechanized infantry. If there were a few they might’ve been able to fight back, but not against a hundred.

“So what do you think this new heavenly emperor intends?”

“Likely to unify the entire nation under his banner. He could probably do it with the support of those machines.” The Steel Battalion was definitely formidable. Unifying Yulong was probably something he could do with their power, Relisha was right.

What should I do...? The tech was definitely stolen from Brunhild. I don’t feel good about it being used for warfare or anything. But at the same time, I can’t just barge in... I’m a bit mixed in general here...

Still, if Gordian is behind this, then I can’t just let it lie. They might have malicious intentions. Guess I could come up with an easy excuse to interfere.

“Alright, then... They stole our Frame Gear, so let’s steal one of theirs. How about that?”

“Hm?” Relisha raised an eyebrow in surprise.

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“...And that’s why I’m gonna steal one of their Steel Battalion!”

“Ohoho... Superb. I like this idea, Touya. You’re gonna let me give it a thorough, deep analysis when you get it, right?” Doctor Babylon grinned menacingly towards me as she spoke. She was probably wondering about what they’d done to her tech.

Yumina, Lu, and Hilde, the three princesses, were staring at me with wide eyes. Sakura was technically a princess, but she was raised and lived as a regular noble. Elze, Sue, and Leen also seemed pretty enthusiastic about the idea. Linze, Yae, and Sakura just seemed a bit puzzled.

“A world leader talking about something so dishonorable as stealing? Just what are you planning?”

“Don’t call it stealing! Call it, uh... Unauthorized eternal borrowing.”

“That’s the same thing!” Hilde frowned. She was the honest type, so it made sense.

“It’s fine, I’ll hide my identity. Look!”

“You are wearing that again, you are?” Yae sighed a bit as she recognized the silver oni mask. It seemed to have a bit of a negative connotation with her for some reason. But I loved it, it let me hide my real identity and also go all-out!

“Then if you steal these machines... Will you be going alone, will you?”

“Nah, I was thinking of taking Tsubaki and Kohaku with me. I don’t want too big of a group, it’ll increase the chances of getting caught.”

“I want to go, too. Can’t I, Touya?”

“You can’t.”

“Hmph. Bully...” I promptly rejected Sue’s request. I didn’t expect her to be at any risk with me, but there was still the chance things could go wrong.

I didn’t tell Kousaka about this, either. He would’ve absolutely vetoed the idea.

“Why’re you doing this, though? Isn’t it fine just to leave them be?”

“I don’t know if they’ll use their mechanized soldiers against other nations afterward. Felsen, Hannock, Xenoahs, Roadmare... I want to know the potential of the enemy, just in case.”

“Then why do you have to go and do it, Touya?”

“It’s my personal prediction, not a national one. I can’t have someone do this on my or Brunhild’s behalf.” I gave general replies to Elze and Linze, but in truth I wanted to find out the true mastermind and take them out for good.

There was just one thing I was worried about.

The king of Felsen had talked about the former Golden Order’s ambitions.

“These people attempt to revive ancient techniques and make use of them, out of sight. This is the purpose of Gordian, the Golden Order.”

It made me wonder if their goals were still the same. If this Neo-Gordian Order was trying to revive the same kind of forbidden magic.

I had a hunch that aiding the current claimant to Yulong’s throne was a part of their ambitions. I couldn’t say for sure, though. It was just a gut feeling.

My gut feelings tend to be right, though... Is this an effect of my divinity, perhaps? Eh... I guess that’s fine... It’s not like it’s an issue.

Using such ancient, taboo techniques took a lot of power. They wouldn’t easily be able to do such a thing. The possibility of it being dangerous or destructive was extremely high, and they could probably cause a major incident by invoking something so primal.

If that was the case, then I had to take them out before it got to that point. I needed to acquire solid proof of their activities before I could make my move, though.

I had a feeling I was going to be in for a wild ride.

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The former glorious capital of Yulong, Shenghai, was now no more than a pile of rubble and trash. There was no trace of the gaudy city that sat there once before.

The Phrase had done a real number on the place, and it honestly made me more than a little uncomfortable. Just looking around really gave a sense of scale for the awesome power that Upper Constructs wielded.

Our group had just gated over from Brunhild, when Kohaku suddenly raised a warning growl.

Kohaku was glaring off in a certain direction, and it didn't take long for us to see a group of vagrants heading toward us in that direction. They were holding knives and axes.

"Hooh... Boy... Leave your money, leave the girl. If you do that, we'll let you live. Scram." One of the men raised a dirty laugh as he yelled. The girl he was referring to was Tsubaki, who stood by my side.

"Who are they?"

"Likely a group of scavengers. They're probably salvaging valuables from the remains of the capital."

So they're vultures... Gross. A group of villains, more like.

"Bastard! You listenin' to me?!"

"I'm not deaf. I can hear you just fine." They were way too impatient, it was a real annoyance. They surrounded us in a circle, knives at the ready.

"Burst forth, Fire! Crimson Eruption: [Explosion]!" I had a feeling they weren't interested in diplomacy, so I aimed an explosive spell at a nearby mound of rubble. A massive sound echoed out as the debris fizzled out into nothing.

Huh? Were my spells always that strong? Is this another side effect of my divinity? I wondered if I'd end up joining the actual gods at the rate I was going. Immortality definitely didn't sound like a bad deal.

"Eeeeeek!"

“Shit, it’s a mage! Get the hell outta here, boys!” The would-be bandits began to scatter in all directions.

So it’s already this lawless, huh...? Guess I’ll head toward wherever the new heavenly emperor is. I pulled up my map and made it display the surrounding area.

“Uh... Let’s see here... The new capital was called Heilong, right?”

“That’s correct. Right here... Northwest of our current position.”

“Alrighty, let’s get going.”

“W-Wait a moment... Do you intend to fly there?”

“Huh? Yeah. Why?”

Kohaku and Tsubaki made pained expressions. Seemed like they hated flying just as much as the others did.

I could’ve used **[Teleport],** but I wasn’t used to operating it at long range, so I didn’t want to appear above a river or something. Seemed like I had no choice.

“...Alright, then. I’ll go to Heilong myself and open up a **[Gate]** for you guys when I land.”

“That would be greatly appreciated...”

“Y-Yes, it very much would be.” If I knew they’d be so fussy, I would’ve brought Gungnir. Still, I could fly faster than any machine all on my own, so it’d be fine.

It was fine by me really. All I had to do was invoke **[Fly]** and then zap off at full speed.

It took me about three minutes to get there at my top speed. As the landscape shifted beneath me, my eyes finally settled upon a city. It was Heilong, the new capital.

Man... That was just a three minute flight, why'd they have to make such a big deal about it? I grumbled as I made my descent into a forested area.

Once I was out of sight, I opened up a **[Gate]** to Shenghai. Kohaku and Tsubaki came through a few moments later.

"Alright, we're ready. Oh wait, I gotta disguise myself." I used **[Mosaic]** to censor my body as I quickly changed my clothing. The people of my old world would associate such mosaic censorship with stark nudity... But I didn't quite strip down to that degree.

"How... fancy..." Tsubaki stared at my Silver Oni outfit and had a fairly interesting reaction. I was a little surprised, since the getup didn't seem particularly gaudy to me. Mask and hakama aside, it didn't strike me as all that special.

"N-Not the color or style or anything, it's just... Your outfit just feels... Evil? I know this is a mission to steal and all, but... It doesn't feel very befitting of a ninja."

Hmph... Being berated by a ninja feels a little funny... Still, no big deal. Not like we're here solely for infiltration, after all.



I took Tsubaki and Kohaku with me to Heilong. There was a little bit of trouble at the gate, but we managed to bribe the guard for entry. It was at this point that I realized how corrupt the guardsmen were in the area. They felt out of place.

Heilong was a traditional Chinese-styled castle town. It had various rows of red-tiled houses lining the streets. There was a tall tower in the distance, and some stalls lining the street paths. I saw some paper lanterns here and there, too.

There was a large castle around the middle of the town, too. I didn't get a good look at it, though. Walls were too high.

It was a town with a lot of things in it, here and there. I saw people shuffling around lifelessly, like they were depressed. I suddenly felt a strange sensation, though.

"Kind of feels like we're being watched..."

"That's because we are. You're being stared at."

"...I told you that your outfit stood out as evil, didn't I?"

Bleh... No point worrying about it now. Besides, people are just looking.

"So, now what?"

"Intel, Tsubaki. You need to collect info on the Steel Battalion. Kohaku, you go guard her. If you can find information on where they are and who made them, that'd be ideal. Don't chase after them or anything, just get the information if you can. We'll meet up again tonight."

"Understood."

"Yes, my lord. I'll contact you if anything happens." Tsubaki and Kohaku promptly vanished into the hustle and bustle.

I decided to take it upon myself to hear from the townsfolk about the new heavenly emperor.

“Hm... One would typically go to a bar for this kinda thing, right?” Even though I was following that logic, it was still midday. I decided that checking out a store or a restaurant would be just as good. I hadn’t eaten lunch either, so it was good timing.

“Uhh... Hm. I’ll go there, then.” I headed toward the roadside and sat in a weathered old chair. There was a menu on the nearby table, but I didn’t recognize any of the dishes at all. I wondered what this ‘Meat Ramein’ thing was, especially. Presumably it had meat in it, but I didn’t know about what kind of meat.

“...Whaddya buyin’?” The stall owner called out to me suspiciously. His eyes were fixed on me, like he was concerned. It was probably because of my mask.

“Ah, er... I’ll have that meat ramein.”

“Sure. One meat ramein comin’ right up.” I decided to people watch as I waited for my food. I saw people coming and going all over the place. I suddenly noticed a distinct lack of women and children in the crowd.

I noticed a disproportionate amount of young armed men walking around. They were wearing pauldrons with a shape that vaguely resembled a Dragon’s head. I wondered if they were the town militia.

Some kind of incident going on? That’s a lotta guards walking around...

“Here. Meat ramein.”

“...Wait a second...” I looked down at the bowl of noodles and meat and came to a stunning realization.

Ramein is just ramen! Wait, no... They're a little different. The noodles are thinner and shorter. Kinda looks like somen, though.

I slurped up the soup, but it was way too thin and gruel-like. The noodles kind of tasted cheap, too. Kind of like the sort of food you'd get on a plane or in a hospital. The meat was tough too, almost like beef jerky. I thought it might soften if I dipped it a bit in the soup, but... Nope, it was as tough as a leather boot.

Well whatever, let's just chow down... This is... Huh...? What the hell's with this flavor and texture...? It kinda tastes like... rubber? It kinda smells raw, almost...? What the hell kind of meat is this thing? Seriously.

"Hey, shopkeep. What meat is this, anyway?"

"Troll flank steak."

"Hgh... K-Keep the change!" I slammed a copper coin down on the table and promptly left.

Wh-What the hell are you trying to feed me, here?! What the hell...

I grumbled in quiet disgust, but I didn't want to make it too obvious on my face.

This area of the country was near Xenoahs' border, so it seemed like some kind of demonic fusion in their cuisine was going on. From what I understood, people of noble families like Sakura and Spica culturally avoided eating the meats of magical beasts. It was hardly tasty, so I didn't blame them for not partaking.

It was true that we'd eaten Dragon meat in the past, though... But that taste was on a whole other level than something like troll meat. I wondered if perhaps Dragons had evolved to be so powerful in order to avoid being hunted for their tasty meat.

I wanted to drink something to wash the bad taste out of my mouth, but I didn't want to check out a store and get something bad again. I opened up my **[Storage]** and took out a thermos of water.

Aaah! After that crap, even this normal water tastes amazing... Hm...?

"Scour the area! They can't be far! Keep looking, fools!" A fuss had been kicked up all of a sudden. There were soldiers all over the place. It seemed like they were looking for someone, which meant something must have happened.

"You there! I've never seen you before! What's with the mask?" One of the soldiers glared at me. I wasn't too surprised, really. I looked super suspicious.

"I'm just a travelin' adventurer, son... Burnt my face real bad back in the day, so I wear this mask ta mask them there scars."

"Really? Prove it!" I quietly used **[Mirage]** to change my face beneath the mask. The soldier approached me quickly, so I began to remove the mask. The image he was presented with was a grizzled, hideously scarred man.

"Ugh... Alright, got it. Put it back on." The soldier was visibly nauseous after seeing 'my' face. I put my mask back on and used the chance to get a little more information out of him.

"What's happened, hm? What's the noise all about?"

"It's troubling, but we're after dangerous criminals. They attempted to kill His Greatness the Heavenly Emperor. A group of two men and a single woman. They likely serve one of the other fakers claiming to be the real rulers..."

Oh my... Is this just what happens in Yulong? Assassination attempts all day? Apparently he'd been attacked in his courtyard. The bigger issue was the fact that assassins had managed to get this far, though.

The heavenly emperor was successfully defended by his personal guard, and the would-be assassins made their escape.

“One of the males in their group, a man wielding a bo staff, was injured around the shoulder. If you see anyone like that, let us know.” The soldier nodded toward me before dashing off. Yulong seemed like it was dangerous as ever.

Man, this is totally unrelated to me, but... The enemy of my enemy is my friend, right?

“Let’s see here...” I opened up the map on my smartphone. I didn’t want to attract too much attention or anything, so I didn’t project it. Though I had the feeling I stood out enough anyway.

“Search. Man with wounded shoulder.”

“Search complete. One in local vicinity.” *Bingo.* I didn’t know the guy, but it seemed like he still had a wound so noticeable that it was still showing.

I thought perhaps they’d have patched it up with light magic, but it seemed like there wasn’t anyone capable of casting it in their group. Nobody must have brought a potion, either.

I decided to go and track the guy down. I was a little guarded, however. I didn’t want to get suicide bombed right in the face again.

“Hmm...” I headed off from the street and found myself in a dense expanse of bamboo, there were few people in the area.

This place seems like the prime spot for a panda to live... Wait no, pandas probably aren’t normal in this world... They probably end up wisecracking and learning kung-fu or something.

I walked down the beaten path as such thoughts passed my mind, but then I paused.

They're here. I felt the presence of two others. One felt different. The different one had already noticed me and was already coming toward me. *Wait, from above?!*

"HAAAAAH!"

"Augh!" The dense mass of bamboo provided the perfect cover for attack, and I just barely managed to avoid the strike. My attacker landed, launching a flurry of blows that I expertly parried, before sweeping out with a mighty kick that I just barely avoided by jumping back. They were wearing a dark black robe that covered their entire body, but they had a voice that reminded me of a woman's.

We clashed again before jumping back and establishing a good distance. The hooded woman suddenly raised her palm and pointed it in my direction.

Wait a second...!

"Haaah!!" She blasted a shockwave toward me and I just barely dulled the impact with a cross counter. I knew that move! The attacker didn't relent, closing the gap in under a second and unleashing a merciless barrage of fists upon my body.

I darted to the side and made a sweeping kick toward her legs. She fell off balance and immediately jumped back, flipping in mid-air as she moved. The jump caused the hood of her cloak to fall away, revealing her true identity.

"Aaaahaaa! I knew it!"

"Mh?!" The dragongirl retreated cautiously as I spoke, beady eyes trained on me.

She was none other than the woman I'd met in the Sea of Trees, the dragongirl who had furiously fought Elze during the pruning, Sonia Parallem.

“What’s going on here?! What’re you doing out in Yulong? Wait, does that mean the injured staff guy is Rengetsu?”

“...Who are you?”

“Huh? Oh, right! You can’t tell because of the outfit.” I was still wearing my mask, so I pulled at a string and let it fall to the ground.

“See? It’s me!”

“Who are you?!”

“Huh?” Sonia was startled by my face for some reason. That was when I remembered I’d forgotten to undo **[Mirage],** so I looked absolutely horrifying. I quickly dispelled the illusion on my face. Sonia had a Mystic Eye that allowed her to see through illusions, but it seemed like she had to actively invoke it. She was similar to Yumina and Her Holiness the Pope in that regard.

“See? It’s me. Mochizuki Touya.”

“Touya...?!” Seemed like she finally had a grasp of what was going on. I sure as hell had no idea why she was in Yulong, though.

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“Come forth, Light! Calm of the Goddess: [Mega Heal]!” I used one of my stronger restoration spells on Rengetsu. The cut on his shoulder was patched up in a matter of seconds.

“...Most incredible. It’s just as it was before.” Rengetsu stood up and smiled as he rolled his shoulder around.



“Still... Why are you here in Yulong, Touya? Or, er... Your Highness the Grand Duke of Brunhild...”

“Ah, don’t bother with the formal stuff. I’m traveling in secret, remember? Right now I’m just the Silver Oni, a wandering warrior from Eashen.” I very quickly intercepted Rengetsu’s attempt to bow down. I didn’t want my identity exposed or anything. Still, it seemed like Sonia’s interest had been piqued.

“Let’s put that aside from now, I have a question. I’ve heard about a group of three that attempted to assassinate the new heavenly emperor. Is that you guys?”

“Assassinate? Is that what they’re saying? It’s certainly true that we broke in and attempted to take his life. But that was no mere assassination attempt. That was justice.”

“Guh... That damned Xiaofah! We got so close, but his guards were stronger than we expected...” Sonia spoke with anger backing her words.

“Xiaofah?”

“The new heavenly emperor, or so he claims. Chieh Xiaofah. Even though he claims divine heritage, he’s nothing more than a weaselly adventurer who became an even slimier thief.” Rengetsu spoke with bitterness behind his voice.

Thief, you say? What’s that mean?

“Ever since the great Phrase invasion of Yulong, there have been a lot of people who showed up claiming they held the rights to the throne. The late heavenly emperor definitely slept around a lot, so him having a large number of successors isn’t all that surprising, honestly. But the concubines and their children, as well as his legal wife, all died when Shenghai blew up. Even his directly known sons that escaped the blast ended up being killed a while ago. That’s why it’s almost impossible to verify who’s lying or not in their claims

nowadays.” That all made sense to me. If a person fabricated a story, all they really had to do was show some kind of object that backed it up, and that would be enough for the foundation of a reasonable claim.

But there were no longer any items in the world that people could use as solid evidence, especially since the capital city was gone.

And so, naturally it just came down to talent or strength. By displaying his might, the candidate could receive powerful support.

But that too wasn’t without risk. The others claiming to be the heirs wouldn’t just roll over and accept defeat. If anything they’d be galvanized to attack each other in order to assert dominance.

“Xiaofah is one such candidate asserting his dominance. He brought out a rare item known as the Heavenly Seal. He claimed that it was definitive proof that he was part of the previous leader’s bloodline, as it’s a royal treasure from the Yulong imperial family.”

“So he’s actually related to the previous guy?”

“Absolutely not. The Heavenly Seal is a precious item that was excavated from a ruin. He coldly murdered the adventurer who found it, and is now trying to claim he’s had it all his life.”

So he swiped it, huh...? Then that means the item he has might not even be legitimate, either.

“The adventurer that he killed was a man who did a lot for the two of us. He looked after us when we were young and inexperienced. We must murder Xiaofah and avenge his death!”

“Normally a guy like him wouldn’t be recognized, even with the Heavenly Seal... But he managed to obtain a frightening force from somewhere else. I’m referring to his—”

“His Steel Battalion, yeah.” Rengetsu nodded at my words.

So a man suddenly appeared with Yulong's Heavenly Seal, and a battalion of mechanized soldiers. It certainly seemed enough to assert one's dominance in the rat race.

But I definitely wondered where he'd obtained his technology. I really didn't want to find out Gordian was pulling the strings here, but I had a bad feeling in general about it. "By the way Tou... Oni Warrior, why are you here?"

"Ah... His Steel Battalion is based on technology stolen from my country. I just came here for a little bit of payback."

"Oh, interesting... They certainly are a technological marvel. But I believe that the Frame Gear I saw fighting those Wood Golems was much more powerful than the Steel Battalion I've seen fighting so far." That much was obvious. The ones in Yulong were reverse-engineered pieces of crap in comparison. But I still couldn't afford to make light of them, they were based on serious tech.

Hm? Who's that...

"Sonia! Rengetsu! Are you alright! Who is this masked man?!"

"It's okay, Jesty. This is a friend of ours. He healed Rengetsu's injury." I was worried we'd been found by the city militia, but I'd been mistaken. It was another fellow wearing the same robe as Sonia and Rengetsu. From what I understood, the two of them had stayed behind to let him escape, but he ended up coming back for them.

"Touy— Oni Warrior... This is Jesty Parallax. He's the son of the adventurer we mentioned just before."

Damn... This really is a revenge mission. The man referred to as Jesty Parallax took his hood down. His hair was short and brown, and his eyes seemed to be hazel in color. I estimated his age at around twenty-one or twenty-two. He was roughly a hundred and eighty centimeters tall.

He was certainly taller than average. Rengetsu was about my height, but Sonia was taller than the two of us. Apparently the draconic clan had many tall women.

Hm... I'm only around a hundred and seventy centimeters right now. I-I'm still growing, right? I'd like to get at least five centimeters more... W-Wait, hopefully my body doesn't stop growing entirely if I fully awaken as a God or something...

"A pleasure. I'm Jesty Parallax. Thank you for healing my friend."

"Hm? Oh, seriously. It's no problem." As I was lost in thought about height, I was greeted by the newcomer. He seemed to be a pretty kind and cheerful young man.

"Alright, staying here isn't gonna do us any good... **[Gate].**" I opened up the same portal that I'd connected to the former capital a while ago.

"Let's go." I ignored the triple assault of stunned faces and walked through my portal. After a brief period, all three of them followed through. Sonia came first, followed by Jesty and then Rengetsu.

"We're..."

"We're in the former capital of Yulong, Shenghai."

"Seriously? That's way far..."

"Incredible... This is the power of transportation magic..."

The three of them looked around with wonder, when Sonia suddenly adopted a combat stance. Seemed like she noticed something.

"Hooh... Boys... Leave your money, leave the girl. If you do that, we'll let you live. Scram."

"...Again, really?" The gang I'd encountered earlier came scuttling out of the shadows, like cockroaches.

Seriously guys? You're doing the exact same thing you did before.

They didn’t seem to realize it was me, probably because of the mask and the different getup.

“[Paralyze].”

“Gwaugh!” I quickly used my smartphone to incapacitate the entire group of dumbasses. Seemed like scaring them wasn’t enough, so I wanted to humiliate them and hope that would drive the message in a bit more.

“So, back to what you guys were saying earlier. If this guy becomes the heavenly emperor, what’ll happen?”

“We’re unsure, but we doubt anything good. You saw his town, right? The lack of women and children? That’s because his men are unreasonably violent. They’re also extorting money from the stores and businesses within the city walls. A lot of merchants have left the city entirely, so trade is largely stagnating. Even if their goods did come back, they’d just be diverted to the castle. The people shuffle around lifelessly because they’re just waiting to die. He doesn’t care.”

Hmph... Was that shitty ramen caused by this, too...? Maybe not.

“Why is he collecting so much money, then?”

“It’s for his Steel Battalion. He’s trying to improve them further, and mass produce them. According to our sources, a vast amount of raw construction materials were brought to his castle a few days ago.” Jesty answered me quickly. It seemed like they were producing the units inside the castle itself, then.

I did wonder where he was getting such vast quantities of materials, though. If he had connections with the Golden Order, then it was probably from Felsen.

“If we leave him be, he will surely use his Steel Battalion to wage war on other nations in the future. He doesn’t want Yulong, this is just a

convenient place for him to flex his muscles. He'd much rather focus on more prosperous nations. And there are some countries bordering Yulong that are doing very decently." Sonia was probably right.

Which country would he attack, though... We've got Roadmare and Xenoahs... That'd be bad. Eashen's a possible target, but it's across a lot of water.

If I were him, then... I'd target Hannock. It might be protected a bit by a river, but a united Yulong could easily stomp it to pieces. There are also a lot of mines in Hannock, so taking it would be strategic. He could bolster the numbers of his Steel Battalion if he conquered that place.

His intentions were probably to conquer Hannock with the Steel Battalion, and establish a new kingdom using that place as the base. He probably viewed Yulong as a lost cause, something that would cost far too much time, money, and effort to rebuild. That would explain why he was hoarding money and goods, and letting the people suffer and die. He was going to abandon Yulong as soon as he found a better piece of land.

He was proclaiming himself the heavenly emperor so he could have a legitimate excuse for building his army, but it was all a temporary measure to him.

"...Yeah, that sounds about right."

"You agree, then? Even if it doesn't have anything directly to do with us, we can't simply turn a blind eye to this situation! Lives are at stake, we must do something!" Jesty clenched his fists, the determination on his face was palpable. He was pursuing the man that killed his father, so such a reaction was only natural.

"We cornered him a long time ago, you know? This was before he was doing his whole heavenly emperor thing, too... But we failed and he escaped. If only we'd managed to kill him back then..." I didn't

think that lamentation was going to do us any good. What mattered was what we could do going forward, not what we couldn't do in the past.

"I should get some information from my friends soon, they're investigating the situation in the capital right now. Incidentally... have you guys heard of the Golden Order?"

"Not ringing any bells here... Rengetsu, Jesty? What about you."

"Not I."

"Nope, never heard of them." All three of them shook their heads.

I wasn't too surprised, it was a secret society. Information on them wasn't supposed to come easily.

"What is this Golden Order, exactly?"

"It's a secret society that might be behind the Steel Battalion's creation. They might be backing Xiaofah as well."

"Ah, well... Now that you mention it... Two of the men guarding him were wearing unusual golden pendants around their necks." Sonia seemed to remember something all of a sudden.

"Pendants?"

"It was a six... No, seven-sided shape. One with a golden circle in the middle of it, that's what I recall at least." Sonia used a stick to draw out a basic image on the ground.

Interesting... The pendants being gold was suspicious enough, but it being seven-sided made it even more curious. From what Leen had told me, I understood that in this world the heptagon was a shape that represented magic. Or, more specifically, the seven pools of magic. Fire, water, wind, earth, light, dark, and null.

The Golden Order was a group built around magic, so it was likely that this pendant could've been their symbol.

I better ask the king of Felsen about this... Wait, that reminds me, I never gave him a smartphone! I had no choice. I pulled out my phone and started scrolling through my contacts list. Eventually, I came to Laim, our household butler.

"'Sup, Laim. You hear me okay?" I asked him to use the Gate Mirror to send a letter to the king of Felsen. It was a simple enough message, asking for him to send over any picture of the Golden Order's emblem if he knew about it.

I figured it'd take a while to wait, so I took out a couple tables and chairs from **[Storage],** seated us all, and then pulled out some tea and donuts.

I should've just eaten these to begin with... I'm never gonna get the taste of troll off my tongue. But I guess I shouldn't close myself off from new experiences... This one just happened to be really, really bad.

The other three were surprised at my sudden inexplicable production of a full table and chair set, but they quickly shrugged and began devouring the snacks I'd set out. They must've been hungry. Sonia seemed especially starved. I wondered if draconians needed to eat more than humans. I didn't mind though, there were plenty of donuts to go around.

I started munching down on the donut I'd picked up. It was tremendously good. But that was to be expected, it was baked by none other than Crea, after all.

Most of the donuts were gone by the time I received a text message from Laim. He'd attached an image to it and sent it without any trouble. He was surprisingly adept with the smartphone for a man his age.

I looked at the image I'd been sent.

“Guess I was right, then.” A heptagon with a golden circle in the middle.

With that, I had my definitive proof. This new heavenly emperor absolutely had ties with the Neo Golden Order.

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“I see... So the Steel Battalion is located in a storage hangar beneath the castle?”

“That’s right. I was unable to infiltrate, but the approximate number down there is around a thousand.”

“There’s seriously that many...?” I was more than a little surprised by what Tsubaki was telling me over the phone. Approximately a thousand? That was incredible. Even Brunhild’s Frame Gears only numbered around four-hundred.

Do they just have more raw materials to work with? Or does it take that much less to produce one? Hell, maybe it’s something different... Could they seriously have a place that rivals the Workshop, though? I guess at this point their Steel Battalion is too different from my Frame Gears, so I shouldn’t compare.

If the materials were being transported to the castle, then it must have meant that they were producing them inside the castle too. That meant if I took the place out, it would render them unable to make any more.

I decided that destroying the place was the smartest move, if only to prevent future complications.

“Ah, one other thing. There’s an incredible barrier placed around the castle. It’s negating most any kind of magic in the vicinity.”

“What a pain in the ass...” That meant I probably wouldn’t be able to send any of the Steel Battalion back to Brunhild. I’d need to hijack one and drive it out myself.

I wondered about what kind of barrier it was, though.

There were various kinds of barriers, after all.

Magic Evasion Barriers prevented targeted spells.

Magic Jammer Barriers prevented invocation.

Magic Enchant Barriers ended up bestowing positive effects on people in the vicinity.

Magic Protection Barriers just straight-up blocked entry to certain locations.

And finally, Magic Seal Barriers prevented people from leaving.

I only knew about these five in particular. There were definitely a lot of others. The talismans and other stuff people could carry on their persons fell under the Evasion category, while the barrier around our very world that prevented the Phrase from coming in would be closer to a Protection type.

Such barriers differed in strength, and it took a lot of time, effort, and magic to produce a powerful one.

The fastest way to take out a barrier would be to destroy the artifact or inscription holding it in place, but these things would often have their own barriers around them as well. It was typically impossible to find these things through my search magic, too.

Really the easiest solution here would be to obliterate the entire city... But obviously I couldn't do that. I'd end up losing the Steel Battalion, and I needed samples.

Either way, I decided to join up with Tsubaki.

I just had to deal with Sonia and her friends first...

"If you're sneaking in, can't you take us with you? We can't possibly excuse ourselves from a mission if it'll get us closer to that scumbag."

“Please take us with you!” Sonia and Jesty bowed their heads toward me in reverence. I sighed. *Well, fine... Taking them isn’t a big deal, I guess.*

“Is it gonna be alright for you guys to come to the capital? Didn’t you get identified already?”

“They already know us, yes. We ended up giving our names when we entered the city with Jesty.”

“Either way, it’s a revenge mission for my father’s honor... I have to do this.”

“Guh...” That definitely meant that they’d be known at this point. Plus, Jesty had been walking around with a dragongirl and an extremely bald guy. They were the definition of standing out like a sore thumb.

“Fine, then. I’ll change how you look with illusion magic.” It’d just get undone the moment we got into the castle, anyway.

It was probably a Jammer barrier, after all. One that prevented the invocation of magic. It also had the added bonus of wiping out passive effects, magic disguises included.

Still, we only needed it to get them through the town.

I used **[Mirage]** to give all three of them the appearance of Yulong peasants, and we headed through a portal back to the bamboo grove.

There were a lot of soldiers hanging out in the area where I’d arranged to meet Tsubaki. The spell held up, and none of them recognized the trio I was with. That was good, except... I was questioned repeatedly due to my mask... It wasn’t fair at all.

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Night fell, and the surrounding streets were shrouded in darkness.

We didn’t want to be spotted, so we headed toward the castle down a deserted road. Up close, the sheer height of the walls was a lot more impressive.

“How’re we gonna sneak in, then...” Once we got close to the walls, I cast a cautious and experimental **[Light Orb].** It manifested for a split-second before flittering out. That meant we were in range of the barrier already.

“We won’t be able to use magic from here.”

“They’ve amped up the guard at the front gate, too.” Rengetsu, Sonia, and Jesty had all lost their magic disguises, as well.

Losing magic was a pain. We could’ve just used **[Invisible]** to sneak through, but that wasn’t really viable.

“Hm... Well, this is annoying. Should we just charge them head-on?”

“What?!” We had firearms, and the enemy couldn’t use magic either. The had bows and arrows, but they could be dodged. If it was just me on my own, I’d have wanted to just rush them.

“W-W-Wait a second! If we’re too reckless in our approach, then our target might run off! We want to avoid that...” Jesty flailed his arms as he spoke. He certainly raised a fair point. I’d completely forgotten about that. I still thought I’d be able to take hold of the whole castle even without magic, but I didn’t want to discourage my allies. *Hm... In that case...*

Kohaku’s ears suddenly twitched, and she stared into the blackness.

“My liege. Someone’s coming this way. It’s likely a guard patrol.”

“Damn it! Guys, scatter! Hide in the nearby bushes.” Everyone quickly obeyed my command.

I strained my eyes to see who was coming by. It was just a couple of guards. They completely failed to notice us.

Once they were far enough for it to be safe, we came out of the bushes and began brainstorming our infiltration again.

We definitely couldn't jump over it. It was about ten meters tall. Though, even without magic, my body was more than capable of leaping about six meters into the air.

"My lord... I can jump over with little trouble."

"Even with me on your back?"

"It won't be a problem."

Hm... Guess we should, then. We're just sitting around like idiots right now.

Kohaku suddenly reverted to her true form, which absolutely terrified the people we were with. I ignored their shock.

I tried opening up **[Storage]** to get some rope, but it closed in just a few seconds. *The barrier even blocks this, huh...?* I moved away from the castle walls to open it up, and I pulled out a long rope.

I won't be able to use magic in there, so I should probably get what I'll need in advance.

I made the necessary preparations and then headed back toward the others. I handed one end of the rope over to Tsubaki, then climbed on to Kohaku's back.

Kohaku crouched and then pounced in a flash. She easily cleared the ten meter wall, landing atop it with a surprising grace. Heavenly Beasts sure were impressive...

Nobody was in the area when we landed, thankfully. There were little shrubs and plants here and there, it seemed we'd landed in a little garden area. I tied the rope to a nearby tree and then yanked on it, sending the signal to Tsubaki.

I looked around and prepped Brunhild on my waist.

Oh, right... I need to test this...

“Blade Mode.” Brunhild’s blade expanded a bit. *Hm... So it still works, just only a little?*

“Blade Mode.”

“Blade Mode.”

“Blade Mode.”

“Blade Mode.” I repeated the command several times, and eventually the blade inched its way to full size. It seemed like I could still use magic, but only for a total of a few seconds. One second of **[Slip]** was still beneficial. A quick use of **[Boost]** or **[Accel]** would help too. **[Apport]** would probably work as well, since it was instant. Brunhild’s Reload command was instant too, so I didn’t need to worry about that.

[Fireball] would probably only work at point-blank range, but I didn’t want to put myself in a situation where I’d get caught in the blast too.

I couldn’t use my smartphone’s target lock in this situation, either. It relied on me using **[Multiple]** for more than a few seconds. **[Paralysis]** probably wouldn’t be much help, either. I’d need to directly touch people for it to take hold.

After thinking about it, I probably could’ve used **[Teleport]** to get through the wall since it would’ve only taken a split-second. I briefly tried to use it... But I ended up coming out in the wrong place. It was too dangerous to use in a place like this, after all.

As I was testing my magic, Sonia came up over the wall. Sonia and Rengetsu were pretty skilled at moving themselves, but Jesty seemed to have a little more difficulty pulling himself up.

Once everyone was up, I took the rope and hooked it on a jutting-out part of the wall, then cast it down to the other side.

We all climbed down to the inner wall, and then Tsubaki retrieved the rope for me. We quickly hid in a nearby shrub. *Alright... We won't need the rope on the way out since I'll be hijacking one of the Steel Battalion, but...*

I had no idea if I'd actually be able to pilot one. I could use Frame Gears no problem, and they were knock-off Frame Gears... But I still couldn't be certain if that'd be enough. "Firstly we need to take out this barrier."

"My lord. Patrolling soldiers inbound." Kohaku, who had returned to her tiny form, caught my attention.

We'd landed in the castle's rear yard. I peeked out from behind a bush and saw two soldiers on patrol. They were holding torches.

"Alright, let's get info on the castle from these guys."

"What should we do? Want me to strike them down?"

"No, hold off. I'll paralyze one of them and interrogate the other." I denied Rengetsu's offer and took a step forward. I very quickly used **[Accel]** for the briefest of moments I could, and timed it perfectly to dash out and intercept the duo. **[Accel]** only let me burst out for a few seconds, but it was more than enough time to get behind the two of them.

I placed my hand on the back of one of them and promptly pulsed him with **[Paralyze].** Then I held Brunhild's blade to the throat of the second guard.

"Not a move."

"Eeep!" *Guess he thinks I killed the guy... He's being surprisingly obedient.*

Sonia and the others followed after me, promptly putting out the fallen guard's torch.

"How do I disable the barrier around this castle?"

“I-I don’t know, I promise... Master Gad erected the barrier, but I know nothing more than that!”

“Gad? Who’s that?”

“Th-The heavenly emperor’s attendant! He and Master Sol often work closely together...” I had the guardsman tell me more, and learned that Gad was a mage. Sol was a swordsman, and he was the one who had injured Rengetsu. They seemed to be a duo and were rarely seen apart.

This Gad fellow had been the one to put the barrier up. That probably meant that Gad and Sol were members of the Golden Order.

The guard didn’t know all the details, but apparently some magical artifact was responsible for the barrier.

We’d gotten everything we could out of him, so I used **[Paralyze]** on him, too.

Rengetsu dragged them off into the undergrowth and hid them behind a tree.

Guess we’ll capture the mage guy and have him take out the barrier... That’ll be useful to us, since he’s an attendant to the fake emperor. Plus, we need to help Jesty get his revenge. We can hold off on the Steel Battalion theft until after that.

So for now we just need to find the heavenly emperor. It’ll probably be easier to find him if I just keep interrogating soldiers.

“Alright, let’s go!” Thus, our infiltration began.

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“Well, this could’ve gone better...” I sighed quietly as I knocked down a few more soldiers.

Our stealthy mission hadn’t exactly gone to plan. We were in the middle of a pretty big battle, as a result.

Even Tsubaki, our infiltration expert, couldn't have helped us. There were four of us holding her back, after all.

We were charging through the castle, fighting hordes of soldiers in narrow hallways. They didn't have any mages to hurl ranged spells at us, which was a relief, but there were still archers supporting the swordsmen. The combination of Kohaku's roaring shockwave and my bullets took out most of the backliners, though. Sonia and Rengetsu then took out the guys closer to us.

We went on and on and on and on, fighting them repeatedly... The repetition kind of reminded me of an old song my grandpa would sing. Not too much, though.

"Is the heavenly emperor's court around here?"

"It is, but we haven't got much time. We've been discovered, so he could flee at any time..."

"Yeah, we can't let him get away." Tsubaki was right, we couldn't afford to waste any more time. If we floundered here, Jesty and the others wouldn't be able to get their revenge. I decided that the best course of action would be an explosive one!

"Kohaku! Blast all these jackasses away!"

"As you wish!" Kohaku fired a massive shockwave from her mouth. Every enemy hit by the sudden blast fell unconscious where they stood.

"Alright! Let's head straight for where that bastard is!" We ran past the fallen soldiers and pressed on until we found a grand hallway with a big red carpet. It was lined with expensive looking vases along the walls. Frankly they looked tacky as hell.

We headed toward the end of the hall and reached a massive door with a dragon carved into it. Naturally we kicked it down.

The room we charged into had a very high ceiling, and contained nothing other than a gaudy throne.

He looked about thirty years old and had a beard. The man wore gaudy, baggy yellow robes. They looked hard to move in. There was a sheathed blade sitting at his waist, and he wore a funny hat that resembled the one Chinese Emperor Zheng, the king of Qin, wore.

Two men stood on either side of him, and it didn't take a genius to figure out who they were.

One of the men looked to be over thirty himself, and he wore dark red armor with a matching helmet. His left hand bore a heavy shield, and his right hand held an unusual weapon that somewhat resembled a hatchet. It was just as large as his massive shield.

The other man wore a black robe and carried a staff. It was crooked at the end in a way that made it look a bit like a question mark. Judging from the getup, he had to be the mage. He looked a tad younger than his partner. His eyes were blue, and his hair was blond. He seemed frail, appearing tall and thin. His eyes, however, reflected malice and cruelty.

Both of them wore pendants around their necks. The symbol of a heptagon within a circle. Proof that they were members of the Golden Order. That meant they were definitely the Sol and Gad that I'd heard about earlier.

Going from what I'd been told, the armored man was Sol, while the gaunt mage was Gad.

"My my... You haven't learned your lesson at all. Do you crave my seal that badly?" The throne-seated man, Fake Emperor Xiaofah, tossed a golden cube up and down in his hand. It had what looked like a dragon sculpted into the side.

That must be the Heavenly Seal... Looks bigger than I expected. Geez, it's around the size of an apple.

“Shut it! I don’t need your words, all I need is your blood! You’ll pay for what you did to my father, cretin!” Jesty promptly drew the sword at his waist. Rengetsu and Sonia stood ready to back him up.

I shrugged slightly, and then a gunshot rang out through the room.

“Wh...!” I fired a single clean shot at the Heavenly Seal, causing it to explode into little fragments. The fake emperor simply stared at his own hand in disbelief.

What an idiot he was. I could’ve easily shot him too, but that wasn’t my job.

“Y-You little rat! What have you done?! That’s Yulong’s treasure, the Heavenly Seal! It’s my seven-thousand year heritage!”

“I don’t give a shit. Who cares about Yulong or its heritage? Plus you’re full of it. Yulong didn’t even exist that long ago.” If you asked me, there weren’t any true heirs left. Trash like the heritage of a pathetic, broken country didn’t need to exist in this world anymore. I honestly couldn’t give less of a crap about their pathetic excuse for a culture.

Honestly, this country has been nothing but a pain to me. I think I’ll just come in as the Silver Oni and conquer the whole place, then divide the territory between Hannock, Felsen, and Xenoahs.

The soldier, Sol, suddenly pointed his weapon toward me.

I fired several bullets in his direction, but his massive shield took the brunt. And after that, he charged toward me.

“Graaaaaah!!!” He swung down his unusual weapon at me... But it was no good, I deftly dodged every cumbersome strike. I then pulled my trigger point-blank at the lumbering oaf’s head. *Ping! Ping!* The shots ricocheted off his helmet. It was surprisingly tough. My bullets didn’t penetrate the armor or harm him.

“Kohaku!”

“Aye!” Kohaku launched a shockwave which knocked Sol to the ground. He rolled around the ground, and I used the time to reload and stock some Explosive Bullets. Those bullets invoked an explosive spell on impact. Their damage would be dampened somewhat by the barrier in the area, but I was sure they’d still do some serious damage.

“Gwuh!” I fired another shot toward Sol’s head.

“Come forth, o Light! Shining Duet: [Light Arrow]!” I suddenly heard someone chanting an incantation, so I leaped to the side.

Several arrows of light blasted through the location I’d just been standing at. *That was a close one!*

I turned my head to see Gad pointing his staff toward me. *You sneaky bastard!*

“...Wait, how’d you cast a spell to begin with?”

“I created this barrier, you impertinent whelp. Do you think I wouldn’t install insurance?”

What, seriously?! You can make it so you aren’t affected by the barrier? You cowardly asshole! But... well, I guess I can’t blame you for setting up the field to your advantage.

“I guess I’m not all that surprised. The Golden Order has some capable mages among its ranks, huh?”

“Wha—?! You little... Who sent you?!” Gad and Sol looked alarmed when I name-dropped their organization.

“A dog from Felsen, are you?!”

“Hm... Who can say? Tell you what. How about you take that barrier down? I’ll show you guys an interesting spell.”

“Unfortunately for you, that can’t be arranged. Unless my magic is drained, or the artifact is destroyed, it can’t be deactivated.” Gad

grinned broadly in my direction. He told me exactly what I needed to know.

“Then all I have to do is destroy the artifact, right? This is a pretty damned big barrier, you know. I doubt it’s easy to hide, so all I have to do is find it and take it out!”

“Worry about your paltry life before that, vermin! **Chill to the bone, o Darkness! I Seek Obedient Bones: [Skeleton Warrior]!**” A magic circle appeared on the floor, and a bunch of rattling skeletal warriors rose out of it. They started shambling toward me with their old, worn-out weapons.

Oh god damn it. Skeleton Warriors are undead monsters... They’re undead! They’re not very strong, but they’ll get up after they’re defeated. If I want to put them down for good, I need light magic, or a weapon with light infused into it.

The big issue here was that magic had been sealed for everyone except Gad, so we couldn’t generate the light we needed. Well, it’s not like it’d be impossible, but I’d need to get into close-range with them to do it.

“...You really are an asshole, you know that?”

“For the sake of the Golden Order, you must die.” I shot a bullet from Brunhild toward one of the skeletons near me. It fell down to the ground with a clatter, but I knew it’d be up again in under a minute.

Tsubaki, Sonia, and Rengetsu easily took out some of the enemies on their own, and even Jesty had managed to take one out. But we couldn’t keep fighting an endless tide. Sol was attacking us alongside the skeletons, too. The situation was grim.

Damn it... I guess I don’t really have a choice here. I’ll try it out...

I let some of my own divinity flow through my palm, and I allowed it to soak into Brunhild. I lined up a shot at the head of a Skeleton

Warrior, and... It crumbled into dust the moment it was hit by a divine bullet.

“What?!” I ignored his screams of surprise and continued to reduce the skeletons to dust. Divinity was beyond mere magic, after all. I was fairly sure that the divinity inside me was the reason I could use all of the elements, as well.

In a sense, a blast of divinity probably contained all the elements of magic in one place. The barrier also did nothing to stop my divinity. Only a god could hinder the power of another god.

I finished mopping up all the mooks and then turned my attention to the throne. I charged over and held Brunhild’s blade to Xiaofah’s neck.

“Eek!”

“Drop your weapons, or I’ll drop his head.” I leveled my threat toward Sol and Gad. *Doesn’t really matter in the end, though. I’m gonna give this guy to Jesty, and then he can do what he wants. I need these two alive though, so I can interrogate them about the Golden Order.*

Gad suddenly adjusted his posture and pointed his staff toward me.

“Come forth, Fire! Purgatorial Sphere of Flames: [Fireball]!” A massive fireball suddenly came hurtling toward both Xiaofah and me.

W-Wait a second, hey!

“Eeep!”

“Oh come on!” I shot a bullet toward the fireball, splitting it clean in two with divinity.

The two halves of the flaming projectile landed behind me and exploded.

“Did... Did you seriously just try to kill the two of us?”

“We have no use for him anymore. We were going to get rid of him soon, either way. All you did was bump up the schedule!”

“Wh-What?! You dare betray me?!” The fake emperor screeched at Sol and Gad.

“A betrayal? Don’t be foolish. Who ever said you were our ally? We gave you the Steel Battalion, and you gave us manpower. We are thankful that you so thoroughly field tested the units for us, but that’s where our relationship ends. The Golden Order will handle matters from here, and you’re no longer needed.”

“What are you going to do next?!”

“We’ll use the Steel Battalion to conquer Felsen, of course.” I stared at them in disbelief. I thought they intended to invade Hannock, not Felsen.

Wait, wait... Felsen? Don’t they know how strong the magic military is over there? There’ll be massive losses on both sides! Unless they’re seriously saying that they’re prepared for that...

“Are you trying to avenge the old Golden Order? Get vengeance for Garland’s death? That’s fruitless!”

“I care not for avenging my father. I simply wish to create a world where the Golden Order reigns at the apex. A new world. A magical world. Where we mages stand elite. I wish to create the Magia Imperium.”

“Wait, father?! You’re the old leader’s son?!”

“That I am. Leader of the Neo Golden Order. Son of Garland Goldie. I am Galzeld Goldie.” Gad, or... Galzeld, introduced himself in a flashy manner and smacked his staff against the ground. This guy was the leader. I had never expected to meet him here.

“I will succeed where my father failed! I will cast the forbidden spell **[Sanctuary],** and when I do... This world will be purged of all non-

magic users! This world will be pure at last!" *What...?* ***[Sanctuary],*** *is it? Is that the spell his dad was trying to cast? I guess he's saying it'll wipe out people who can't use magic, but not everything adds up here...*

Why Felsen? Why invade them? Is there an artifact there that they need or something?

"There's still a lot I don't really get, but that doesn't matter. If you're the leader of the Golden Order, then I can't let you get away."

"Oh, really now?" Galzeld stared me down. There was no fear in his eyes. As he laughed, the wall behind him and Sol broke. A large mechanical hand burst through into the room.

A short and headless machine appeared amongst the wrecked wall. It wielded a conical lance in its hand. *It's one of the Steel Battalion!* It bounded into the room with incredible force and thrust its weapon toward the throne.

"Guh!"

"Eeekeeeh!" The fake emperor and I darted out of the way just in time. His beautiful throne was completely trashed. No manner of gaudiness could save it from looking like the trash it was now.

Damn, this thing's actually pretty strong. If the old model Chevaliers are around a ten, then this thing's definitely an eight.

"Uwaaah!" The fake emperor ran away down the hallway at top speed. He was a former thief, so I wasn't too surprised. It seemed like his biggest talent was running. I couldn't afford to let him go, though.

"Tsk... Jesty! You guys! Go after him!"

"G-Got it!" Jesty, Rengetsu, and Sonia all ran after the faker.

The only people left here on my side were Kohaku and Tsubaki.

“You really think you can attack the Steel Battalion on your own? How arrogant...” A loud voice came out of the machine. It sounded crackly, like it was being transmitted through a cheap speaker. It was the voice of the pilot inside.

There was a lot of stuff falling over, so the voice was a little difficult to make out, but... I knew who it belonged to.

“...I see. So you ran off and joined these guys, huh? Is that right, Bowman?”

“Wh— Buh... H-How?! How do you know who I am?!”

I knew it. What an idiot... This guy is none other than Roadmare’s former magitech expert, Edgar Bowman.

He was the guy that caused that disaster with the rampaging Golems. He was stripped of his position and sent to the mines as a convicted criminal. He obviously had no idea who I was, since I was still in my Silver Oni disguise.

I’d been informed that he’d escaped due to outside interference, but it all fell into place now. He’d been jailbroken by the Golden Order.

“I see, I see... So your Golden Order buddies made this with you, huh? This piece of junk.”

“Junk?! What did you say?! This is one of my incredible Steel Battalions! They are my masterpieces who will conquer the entirety of Yulong! You’ve seen what they’ve done, haven’t you?!”

“Don’t go getting high and mighty over something you reverse engineered based on stolen tech. Compared to the Brunhild Frame Gears, these things are garbage.”

“You little wretch!” He thrust his lance toward me. But his movements were way too telegraphed.

I dodged it, over and over, while taking note of how it attacked.

The function behind moving it seemed different to a Frame Gear's. The Frame Gear scanned your brain and read your motions, so it was like an extension of your own body. It worked in tandem with its pilot.

The machine before me felt like it had been programmed with movement patterns. It kind of moved like fighting game characters did after inputting certain commands.

I didn't exactly mean it seemed as simplistic as 'press A to punch and press B to kick,' but it definitely felt similar to that kind of control system. The controls might have been functional, but it probably meant they couldn't adapt all that well to diverse situations. The one inputting the commands was human, after all.

It could've been influenced by the barrier, though. Frame Gears had magic flowing through them and that helped their movements. But I didn't think that any of the Steel Battalions could replicate such complex functions.

"These things really are crappy!"

"Silence!" I darted beneath one of its heavy arms and sliced it at the elbow with my Divine Brunhild.

The arm, along with the lance it was wielding, crashed to the ground.

"What?!" I dived beneath the machine and sliced both knees in a similar fashion. The mech fell off-balance and fell forward, crashing to the ground.

"No! Impossible, improbable, inconceivable! How could this happen?! How could one of my beautiful creations be defeated?!"

"Wh— How could this be? Defeated by one man?!" Sol stared upward in disbelief, so I quickly used **[Accel]** to dart toward him. The barrier made it last almost no time at all, but it was enough time to close the distance.

“Guh!” He raised his shield, but that mattered not. I sliced right through it, and it cut through to his arm.

“GWAAAUUUGH!”

“Enough already. Just shut up! **[Paralysis].**”

“Ghuh!” I touched him and his fate was sealed. His body slumped to the floor in an instant.

There was a massive amount of blood spewing from the gash on his arm, so I quickly sealed the wound with a brief burst of healing magic. I had questions for him, after all.

“Got anything else up your sleeve?” I stared Galzeld down with fire in my eyes. But he just responded with a gentle smile.

“Ahaha... You’re strong. Incredibly strong... What a wonderful Oni. You can use magic as well, it seems. How about it, would you like to join the Golden Order? Once we create the Magia Imperium, and I stand tall as the Mage Imperator, you could join me as my right-hand man.”

“Right-hand man? Don’t give me that. I was promised half the world once by a jackass like you, and I declined that offer too.”

Well, that dragon guy would’ve ended up getting eaten regardless of whether or not I joined him.

“Oh? How unfortunate. You need to die, then.”

“That Steel Battalion bot is busted. Your soldier friend is out cold. Do you really think you’re in a position to negotiate and talk big?”

“And just what do you think a battalion is, young man? It is many.” Galzeld grinned, and the very ground beneath me began to shake and rumble.

I looked through the ruined wall at the garden area, and I saw several magic circles on the ground. An entire Steel Battalion of battle robots began to rise up from them.

They looked the same as the one I'd defeated before. They held many different weapons. Some had spears, some axes, some swords. Some even held what appeared to be crossbows.

"Crap. That's right, there were a thousand or so in the basement... I forgot."

"Oho? You even knew that much? Well, let me tell you a little secret. There aren't that many here anymore. We've already deployed more than a good ninety percent of them toward the Felsen border. We've been improving them steadily, as well. We already have enough to take on those Felsen fools."

Talk about prep work... I guess we should've acted sooner. If there are around fifty here, then that means there should be around nine-hundred-and-fifty over by the border... That's bad. I guess I should take these ones out before worrying about them, though.

I wasn't worried at all, though. I had a good reason to be calm.

"...Hey, Galzeld. Don't you hear that sound?"

"...Excuse me?" I grinned at him, and he suddenly became a little more uneasy. He perked up his ears in a desperate attempt to understand what I was hinting at.

The sound of steel upon steel could be heard in the distance. The sound of the rumbling earth was getting closer and closer. The sound of explosions, of shaking. He ran outside to see what he'd heard.

"No...!" What he witnessed outside was simple. His Steel Battalion being ripped apart. The perpetrators? A light purple samurai machine, and an orange-gold knight machine.

It was Yae in her Schwertleite, and Hilde in her Siegrune.

“Impossible! Why are the Brunhild Frame Gears here...?!” Yae’s Frame Gear danced around the battlefield. It used its short sword to strike the Steel Battalion at all angles, separating limbs from bodies in the blink of an eye.

Hilde’s Frame Gear valiantly stomped around, blocking lances with its mighty shield. It then violently rended its foes apart with heroic slashes.

I’d considered the possibility of the Steel Battalion being deployed, so I’d set up a portal that only Frame Gears could pass through before the mission began. I telepathically contacted Luli and Kougyoku to have Yae and Hilde prepare for battle. The magic barrier didn’t affect the telepathic link, after all.

The Steel Battalion went after Schwertleite and Siegrune, one after the other. There were over twenty of them remaining. It wouldn’t be impossible for them to win if they swarmed with sheer numbers, and that was probably what the pilots were hoping to achieve.

But the swordswomen from my household weren’t the kind who would lose to mere fakers, numbers be damned. The new Frame Gears weren’t just for show, after all.

The destroyed members of the Steel Battalion piled up one after the other.

“Ghh...!”

“I don’t know what you were planning, but you should just give in here. How about I take you straight to the king of Felsen?”

“Hah... Hahahah... You are a Felsen dog, then... But Felsen has no future, I promise you this! They will yield to the Golden Order, they will yield to me!” Galzeld yelled as he held his staff to the sky.

At that moment, his staff let out a tremendous burst of light, I brought my arm up to shield my eyes.

When the light subsided, Galzeld was no longer there. I heard the sound of small, beating wings, and I looked over toward it. There was a bat flying toward the east.

Wait, is that him?! Did he use a transformation spell or something? Is that his Null magic?! Regardless of how he'd done it, I couldn't let him get away. I invoked **[Fly]** in order to give chase, but I flew about two meters before crashing to the ground. That damned barrier was still active!

"Kohaku!"

"Understood!" Kohaku ran over, and I jumped on to her back. She sprinted for the massive walls and leaped over them. I soared into the air with **[Fly]** once I was out of range, but I couldn't find the bat at all.

"Search. Any bats nearby?"

"...Search complete. No bats within a five-kilometer range."

Damn it! No way can a bat fly that fast. Did he transform into something else? Or did he just use another barrier to screw with my search spell?

Guess he got away... No, wait. I can still get him!

I used my smartphone and locked on to all trees in a five-kilometer radius with **[Multiple].** It took a while to calculate, the city had a good number of trees in it.

But then I used my spell... **[Absorb].** The trees, on command, began sucking out all magic from their vicinity. All the magic around them was wiped away, except mine of course.

"Search. Galzeld."

"Search complete. Three kilometers, southeast." The magic had been sucked away, effectively undoing his disguise. I needed to hurry up

and catch him. He'd be able to regenerate his magic if he got away from the trees.

I ran through the city and dragged Kohaku along with **[Teleport]** to quickly reach his position.

We came out in the forests on the city outskirts. I looked over to see a bird suddenly turn into a man and fall to the ground. The process repeated itself a few times. It was Galzeld, constantly trying to transform so he could escape. After a while, he noticed Kohaku and I.

"D-Did you do this?!"

"Well, well. We meet again. Time to show you that spell I promised you. **[Slip].**"

"What?!" I canceled **[Absorb]** and tripped him up. He fell down and lost his staff, and promptly smacked the back of his head.

I loaded a special round into Brunhild and then pointed it at Galzeld's feet. It was my ultimate Infinity Omega Slip Bonanza Bullet.

It constantly invoked a slipping spell, over and over again. It would draw from my magic to constantly reapply the spell, trapping someone in a slippery hell that never ended. Even if I wasn't nearby, a single bullet contained enough power to keep someone falling for three days. So I guess calling it an Infinity Omega Slip Bonanza Bullet wasn't quite right... Maybe Three-day Omega Slip Bonanza Bullet worked better.

"Gwuh! Ughuh! Fhguh!!!"

Can't channel magic while you're falling all the time, can you? The beauty of my slipping magic was that it responded to motion. So a person falling into it would slip again, and then slip again forever. From the first fall, your fate would be completely sealed.

I whistled merrily, ignoring Galzeld's pleas, and took a certain item out of my **[Storage].**

The item was a large three-meter by three-meter cube with a glass-like surface. Within this cube was the foul-smelling corpse of a particular species of slime. That's right. It had been a long time, but the dreaded stinkbox was back. I'd also added a few improvements since last time, as well.

I didn't want sealed people to use magic in there, so I enchanted the interior with **[Absorb].** That would prevent any kind of magic. Not that it was really a place that facilitated magic very well.

"Punishment time..." I used **[Gate]** to trap Galzeld in the box.

"WH— BRUGHGAUUUH! IT STINKS?!" He held on to his nose and used his free hand to bash against the walls of his confines. His face went from a shade of red, to purple, to white. There was an enchantment that let you hear his voice from the outside, too.

"Urgh... Blurgh... I-It reeks! Please!"

"Too bad. It's not over yet, you know? Try this on for size." I pushed a button on the outside of the box, which triggered the internal speakers. The writhing man within was suddenly assaulted by the combined sounds of nails on a chalkboard and forks scraping on plates.

"HNNNNNNGH!!!"

"Oof!" *Ow, damn it... I forgot to soundproof the box.* I hit another button, and the man's screams were silenced. Fortunately, his suffering continued regardless of whether or not I could hear it.

"&*^%!!!" He tried to cover his ears so the sound wouldn't reach him, but that only caused him to inhale the vile stink. When he cupped his nose, the sound drove him wild again. He kept repeating the motion in a desperate search for relief.

His face was covered in snot, drool, and tears. It was disgusting.

"My liege... Don't you think..."

“Look, Kohaku. This guy really pissed me off. Those barriers were a pain, you know? This is just a little bit of fun, it’s no big deal.”

“I still think this is a bit much...”

I gave Kohaku a small glare and she backed off. *Putting him in the box is good for screwing with his sense of hearing and smell, but... I bet I can make it worse!*

I cast **[Mirage]** to generate the sensation of vile creatures all over his body. From his perspective there were cockroaches, worms, and larvae crawling over and under his skin.

“^%*$%!!!”

Ha! He finally started hitting the wall again. It’s made of phrasium, you idiot. Not gonna break unless you have a crystal weapon in there, moron. Hope you’re having a good time, jackass!

Galzeld began sweating profusely, and his knees shook to the point of buckling. He looked like a squirming, writhing newborn baby. I took a sadistic glee in watching him cry.

Eventually he fell to the ground like a puppet with all its strings cut. His entire body violently twitched, and foam spewed from his mouth. He was clearly unconscious, but his eyes were wide open. Suddenly, I had a great idea.

“I just realized. If I use **[Refresh]** to keep him at peak health, I could keep him in a perpetual state of suffering. That’d be hilarious.”

“My liege... If you go any further, I’m afraid I won’t be able to view you as a human anymore.” Alas, Kohaku’s pleas stopped me from executing my plan. That was kind of annoying.

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I left Galzeld with Kohaku, and headed back to the castle.

I couldn't put humans in **[Storage],** sadly. He smelled absolutely awful when I pulled him out of the box, but I needed to leave him with Kohaku in case he had any allies around.

By the time I got back, the battle was pretty much done. There were pieces of the Steel Battalion all over the place.

Damn it... I wanted to take an undamaged one home... But that might not be possible. Ah well, maybe Doctor Babylon can fix one up.

Soldiers and servants alike were streaming from the castle in droves. This was a major incident, so it wasn't too surprising.

I headed back to the throne room and found Tsubaki tying up Sol and Bowman. I figured I'd need to give Galzeld and Sol to Felsen, and Bowman to Roadmare.

"Your Highness. Where's Galzeld?"

"Caught him. Kohaku has him." *More importantly... Where the heck is Jesty? I can't use my search magic because of the barrier... Guess I'll follow after where the faker ran.*

Eventually I found Jesty and the other two. They were looking down at the bloodied corpse of the false emperor. It seemed like they'd achieved their goal.

Jesty had slashes all down his body, and he held a sword in his hand that dripped crimson. It was obvious that neither Sonia nor Rengetsu had helped him. If they had joined in the fight, there was no way Jesty would've sustained wounds like that.

"Looks like you're done here."

"Quite... Thank you, I owe you a debt. The killer is gone now... I think my father will be able to rest in peace now."

Is he crying...? His eyes look kinda red. But I guess he's finally killed the man who took his beloved father away, so there's nothing worth questioning here.

“Let’s leave, then. You can come to Brunhild if you don’t have anywhere else.”

“Thanks.” Rengetsu answered. Jesty still seemed a little out of it. I brought the three of them over to Tsubaki, and found that Yae and Hilde had exited their Frame Gears.

“Hm...? These are the individuals from the Pruning, they are.”

“Oh? That’s right... They were Elze and Lucia’s opponents, no?”

“Ah, I remember you...”

“Then it was you two in those Frame Gears?” The four of them vaguely recognized each other, but they hadn’t directly encountered one another before. The most they knew about each other was their general appearance.

I properly introduced Yae, Hilde, and Sonia’s group to each other. Sonia was surprised to learn that they were both my fiancees, but they were even more surprised to learn that I had seven other fiancees, including Elze and Lu.

Marriage revelations aside, I wondered what to do with the destroyed machines.

It would’ve been a lot easier if I could’ve just mass transferred them with **[Gate].**

I wondered just where the artifact maintaining the barrier was. Usually they were tucked away in a corner somewhere, or right at the center of the barrier. But there was nothing in particular in the corners of the throne room, and only the trashed throne was in the middle.

I suddenly noticed two glimmering objects above me. Two golden dragon heads on each corner of the roof. They faced each other and glimmered brightly in the light. They kind of reminded me of the traditional Japanese fish decorations used in some castles.

Wait a second... I drew Brunhild and blasted them to bits. I was operating under the assumption that they were the things maintaining the barrier, so they'd be useless to anyone that wasn't Galzeld.

Right after breaking them I attempted to use **[Fly].** It went without a hitch. I'd clearly broken the right things. If only I'd noticed sooner.

I opened up a massive **[Gate]** and moved all the Steel Battalion remains to the hangar.

It'd be nice if this place was settled now that heavenly emperor bastard's gone... But it probably won't be the case. Another one will just rise in his place. This country really sucks. It's trapped in a vicious cycle.

That being said, I later learned that Xiaofah had already killed all the other contenders for the throne. It was likely that Yulong as a nation was finished.

I figured that allying the remaining city states in the broken Yulong and choosing a leader from those people might be wise, but it was likely that no matter who was chosen they'd end up being crooked.

No, come on... That's prejudiced, Touya. You can't just write off an entire people. There has to be at least one good person in Yulong... Even if you haven't met anyone meeting that criterion...

I got involved in the situation this time because of the Steel Battalion, but I really would've preferred it if they handled their own internal affairs.

From what I'd heard, there were cities close to Hannock in Yulong's territory that wanted to defect to Hannock. It was possible that neighboring nations would just naturally eat up the territory formerly known as Yulong.

The imperial family started fighting each other after the Phrase... All these fake successors started popping up... It was honestly possible that there was just nobody left who could claim leadership.

I checked the castle basement and, sure enough, there was a facility designed to create the machines. It was evacuated though, which meant it was no longer functional. I didn't want any trouble in the future, so I trashed it before leaving the place for good.

The following day, I traveled to Roadmare with Bowman. He wasn't going to be lucky enough to get sent to the mines this time. They unanimously decided on the death penalty. A lot of Yulongese people died in his insane pursuit of knock-off Frame Gears. He had to atone for his crimes. Doge Audrey thought that she had to make an example of him.

After that, I brought the other two to Felsen. They were more than happy to take Sol into custody. Galzeld, on the other hand... He smelled really bad. Like, really bad. I kind of screwed up in that regard.

The situation was worsened when it turned out that Sol didn't know all that much, and Galzeld was so mentally traumatized by the box treatment that he couldn't even form a coherent sentence under duress.

His eyes were glazed over, and he drooled like an idiot. All he would do was mutter and giggle. I... I definitely overdid it.

"Grand Duke... What... Wh-What did you do to him?"

"...I uh... I just made him smell some stuff, and hear some stuff. You know? Like, a little revenge. It wasn't a big deal." The king of Felsen looked down at the murmuring husk of what was once Galzeld Goldie. He pinched his nose and glared in my general direction.

There was a barrier in the underground jail that negated magic, but it didn't negate the godawful stink coming from the man.

We couldn't take it much longer, so we headed out to the courtyard. I took in as much sweet, clean air as I could once I got out there.

"Man, that stuff really lingers..." I sniffed my clothing and felt like the stink was actually sticking to me. I remembered reading about a deodorant spell in the Library. I decided I definitely needed to memorize that one.

The king of Felsen took out a strong-smelling perfume and started liberally applying it to himself. I borrowed it and put some on myself as well. Now the two of us smelled like citrus and mint, which was definitely an upgrade.

I didn't expect this guy to carry around something like this... He probably had it around so he could smell good for his fiancee.

"Ah yes, Grand Duke. Do you recall the Guildmaster from our Magical Chamber of Commerce and Industry?"

"Hm? That guy with the sunglasses?" *He was called Easeus, right? He's in charge of the massive Felsen organization that manages all the craftwork, mages, and trade in this country.*

"He has three sub-masters that work beneath him, but one of those three went missing this morning. We searched his home, and found a certain item." The king of Felsen held up a circular pendant with a heptagon in the middle. It was a clear mark of the Golden Order.

"Guess he freaked out when he learned Galzeld got caught."

"That's likely, yeah. He was part of an elaborate plan to murder me, in fact." The raid on the sub-master's house revealed more details on an extensive game plan. Galzeld would attack Felsen from the outside, while this man would subvert Felsen from the inside.

"Shame I didn't get to make use of my Brave King..."

"...What kind of name is that...?" The king of Felsen gestured toward the fancy sword around his waist.

Brave King, huh...? What a name for a sword. This guy has a really terrible naming sense. I think he'd probably get along with Fashion King Zanac, though.

"Anyway, there's still the matter of that forbidden spell they were trying to cast..."

"Oh, you mean **[Sanctuary].** To be blunt, that's a domination spell."

"A what now?"

"Ludo told me all about it. It's a foul spell that twists the mind. The worst thing about this particular spell is that it can affect many people at the same time, and the affected parties won't even be aware that their free will has been stripped away."

So, like brainwashing? That's certainly beyond mere subliminal messaging...

"If people were under the effects of the spell, then they'd readily accept anything the caster wanted to be considered normal. Galzeld probably planned on using this to create a nation where magic supremacy was not only accepted, but celebrated." We didn't really know how to invoke it or anything. Sol was a warrior for the most part. He had some magical aptitude, but he barely knew a thing about the finer details. Galzeld wasn't in a position where he could answer questions, either.

"Well, that's annoying... I guess I'll have to ask my resident expert."

"Excuse me?" These taboo, forbidden spells were created by the ancient civilization. For matters like this, it was just more convenient to ask someone who lived in it.

I took out my smartphone and started making a call to a certain contact. The phone rang a couple of times and she finally picked up.

"'Sup, Doc."

“Ah, heyo. C’mon, don’t call me that... Doc is so impersonal, you know? How about you call me Regina? We are lovers, after all.” Doctor Babylon picked up the call and started casually yapping away.

Since when were we lovers? I don’t recall accepting your love.

“Anyway, I have a question. Do you have some free time to answer, Doctor?”

“Hmmph. Are you really gonna be like that...? Fine, what is it?”

“Have you heard of a spell called **[Sanctuary]** at all?”

“Oh, that one? Uh... yeah, it’s a pretty potent mind control spell. What about it?”

“Do you know how to invoke it?”

“Sure do. A lot of sacrifices. Specifically, magically potent people need to be sacrificed. They have to be the same race as the caster, too. The bigger the range, the more sacrifices are needed. Although if the caster has a huge amount of magic, that can offset the amount of people who need to die.”

Sacrifices, geez. That sure sounds bloody. But I guess these spells are forbidden for a reason.

“The effect wears off after you leave the spell’s range, though. It wasn’t considered a popular or useful spell, especially since anyone with decent magic power is resistant to it.”

“Wait, seriously?”

“Pretty much. It was used in maximum security prisons at most, and even then it wasn’t all that great. Not every country used it, either. Partheno certainly didn’t.”

Huh... I guess it’d be useful to prevent prison riots and stuff. But I wonder who they sacrificed for it... Maybe death row inmates were sacrificed to maintain the spell? Who knows.

“So what would it take to cast it on an entire country?”

“Don’t make me laugh. Do you know how many people would have to die for that to pay off? You’d basically need to kill the population of another country just to maintain that kind of effect. Plus the people dying would have to come in a steady stream. Humanity would have to go extinct for it to work out.” Well, that certainly lined up with what was said. I wondered if that’s why they’d declared war on Felsen. They could’ve used the casualties as fuel for the spell. The elite soldiers of Felsen were famed for their magic potency, after all.

Even so, it seemed like the Golden Order had fundamentally misunderstood the spell. If a person left the range, then it’d be undone. It’d be super impractical to try to reign using it. Plus more sacrifices would be necessary. Were they planning on fighting an eternal war? It was possible that they’d learned about the spell from old writings or something, but misinterpreted or simply missed information that would’ve clarified the important details.

“Alright. Thanks for the help.”

“Sure, no problem. Oh, I have a request. I would like for you to show me more of those Annie Mays we were watching the other day.”

“Mm... Yeah, alright. Just don’t go binging them all night again, alright?”

“Fine, fine. I got it. I promise!” I showed her the anime that originally inspired me to create the Fragarach, but it probably ended up being a mistake. I’d shown her a single show, but she was thirsty for more... She seemed to get a lot of ideas while watching the shows. It made me wonder if she’d start making legless Frame Gears or something at some point. Though, those robots were more suited to space battles than anything else.

I told the king of Felsen about what the doc had told me. He was a little surprised I had such a comprehensive source, but gradually began to nod along.

“I see... So they simply missed the information about the limitations and passed down the knowledge of it being a more powerful spell than it was, hm?”

“Maybe, but I’m not so sure. After all, they could mentally condition people with a command like ‘leaving the sanctuary is dangerous.’ It doesn’t change the fact that controlling the mind is messed up.” Despite the limits of the spell, they would’ve still been able to do it. The prison method used in the past was a little frightening, honestly. Putting human rights issues aside, sacrificing the condemned to placate the imprisoned... It was super messed up. It really did deserve its status as a forbidden spell.

“Still, in the long-term, the spell wouldn’t have helped Gordian create what they longed for...”

“That’s right.” *They really were a pathetic lot... They’re the daydream believers who hope for something better, and cling on to stuff they can’t achieve.*

“It’s still troubling that there are so many that followed their ideals, though. According to Sol’s testimony, Gordian’s members number more than we expected. There’s also the remaining members of that Steel Battalion. Their leader has been captured, and there’s only a faint glimmer of hope for their forbidden spell. They only have one final course of action, I think...”

“Your Highness! Armored Wood Golems and several strange machines are near our Yulong border! The scouting report numbers around three-thousand of them in total! They’re marching in the direction of the capital!” An exhausted soldier charged over and started screaming at us.

I goddamn knew it.

But wait, Wood Golems too? Bowman, you son of a bitch!

“Th-Three thousand...?!” The king of Felsen started sweating bullets, but I turned to him with a grin.

“Need a hand?”

“Huh?”

“Yeah, no worries. Our stolen Frame Gear ended up creating the basis for the Steel Battalion anyway. Also they kind of pissed me off, so I’d like to put a stop to them.”

I already had enough to worry about with the Phrase and everything else. I didn’t need these guys adding to the troubles.

I decided that I’d end the problem right there, once and for all.

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“Oooh... There’s a lot...” They were pretty far off, but the Steel Battalion and Armored Golems were advancing in our direction.

There were roughly three-thousand in total. About nine-hundred-and-fifty of them made up the Steel Battalion, and the rest were Golems.

Some of them were being piloted by mages, but not all of them. About two thirds of them were being automated by Golem cores, and a lot of the pilots were non-mages.

The Golden Order saw anyone who could even use a little bit of magic as an ally. Sol was only capable of a small amount, but that’s why he was accepted by them. But anyone that couldn’t use magic was seen as inferior beings, and treated like barbarians.

Sol had been promised a high-ranking military position in the new Magia Imperium that they wanted to establish, but that dream wasn’t going to happen now.

Operating one of the Steel Battalion wasn't difficult. An amateur could handle it after a few days of practice. Though of course the individual capability definitely varied.

So yeah. Nine-hundred-and-fifty Steel Battalion units, two-thousand-and-fifty Armored Golems... And about sixty Frame Gears waiting to fight them. We were outnumbered roughly fifty to one.

They had an overwhelming numerical advantage, that much was true. I wasn't afraid, though. I'd fought the one Bowman was piloting, and figured out a few things. It was clearly different to the Frame Gears. They just couldn't compare to our new models. Though I definitely needed to support the army. I couldn't expect everyone to be able to take out fifty enemies alone.

"Grand Duke... Will this many truly be enough to win?"

"We're going to be fine, don't worry about it. Just trust me on this. I don't think your battlemages need to trouble themselves, honestly." The king of Felsen sighed quietly, so I gave him some reassurance.

There were around two-thousand battlemages behind the Frame Gears, just in case. I told him we didn't need them, but I didn't mind them standing by if it made him feel better.

A rabbit-eared knight came bounding over toward us.

"Milord. All combatants have boarded their Frame Gears. We're ready to move whenever."

"Roger that. Let's take care not to overexert ourselves."

"Of course." Knight Commander Lain gave me a little salute and boarded her Shining Count. I was really proud of how far she'd come. She had the makings of a true leader in her.

There was a crest with a rabbit design carved on to the pauldrons of Lain's Frame Gear. Given she was a rabbit beastman herself, it made

sense to me. Apparently Linze had designed the emblem, which caught me by surprise.

Similarly, there was a fox emblem on Vice-Commander Nikola's Frame Gear, and a wolf on Vice-Commander Norn's.

Each of them was leading a sub-group of twenty Chevaliers. On top of that, Elze, Yae, and Hilde were participating with Gerhilde, Schwertleite, and Siegrune. Moroha was also hanging around as extra firepower. With all that stuff backing us, I had nothing to fear at all.

"Alright. Shall we begin?" The moment I spoke, dozens of portals opened in the air above the enemy. I connected my **[Storage]** and allowed several small phrasium balls to rain down on the enemy. Naturally I'd increased their weight with **[Gravity]** as well.

"[Meteor Rain]!" They all fell down at the same time. The altitude was too high for a pin-point precise attack, but it wasn't like they were easy to dodge to begin with.

The Steel Battalion and Golems alike were whittled down by the crystal barrage. The earth itself trembled as the balls penetrated the ground.

Their numbers ended up being reduced by about a third by my initial strike alone. I used my smartphone to broadcast to everyone on the battlefield.

"All units, engage! Let's wipe 'em all out!"

"HOO-AH!!!" All the Frame Gears started following their respective commanders. The gray Chevaliers began to trade blows with the Steel Battalion. After only two or three hits, a Chevalier was able to slice one of the Steel Battalion scrapbots in half.

Height-wise, the Steel Battalion only came up to a Frame Gear's chest. They still looked sturdy due to their stout design, but it

seemed like that was more for their looks than anything else. In all honesty, they were more flimsy than you'd expect. They were kind of like cheap foreign knock-offs, with a lot of cut corners in the manufacturing process.

I wondered exactly how shoddy the raw materials they used were. They were honestly crumpling like dollar-store goods.

Hell, when they hit Frame Gears, little bits of them broke off on impact. It was pitiful to watch.

"I guess I'll be heading out, then."

"Just don't go nuts, yeah? No need to rend the earth or sky. Just offer your support."

"I got it, I got it..." Moroha merrily charged on to the battlefield, wielding a two-meter phrasium blade in one hand.

You're gonna shock them on appearance alone... None of them are gonna expect a swordswoman to charge them!

"Die, die, die!! Get crushed, losers!" Elze's Gerhilde was firing its pile bunkers all over the place, crushing Golem cores left and right. She raged across the battlefield like a crimson deity of destruction.

Yae's Schwertleite was gracefully dancing across the battlefield, slicing any enemy it came across cleanly in two. She didn't waste a single motion.

Hilde's Siegrune was supporting the Chevaliers by blocking attacks with her shield, and crushing the enemy with counter-attacks. She was doing a great job of defending her allies in the more crowded parts of the battlefield.

"Touya, Touya! Come on! Haven't I waited long enough?!" I suddenly heard a voice from a mech that I hadn't deployed to the battlefield. It was Sue, in her personal Frame Gear. Ortlinde.

It was a Frame Gear that specialized in defensive functionality. It had a coating of phrasium above its orichalcum base, giving it the strongest armor out of any Frame Gear produced so far. It was golden and adorned with black here and there, giving it the most gaudy appearance as well. It wasn't quite to my taste, but Sue demanded it... I couldn't win against her whining.

It was a complete coincidence that the name matched up with her family name, too... It just happened to go with the naming scheme. I'm serious. That's why I said it twice.

While it specialized in defense, that wasn't its true power.

"Alright, let's let you debut then. It's the first time, so we'll try manual control. Cesca, Rosetta, Monica. You ready?"

I put my smartphone up to my ear to get the final confirmation.

"Gungnir ready, Master."

"Laevateinn ready, sir!"

"Mjolnir is, like, totally ready!" I confirmed that they were all ready to roll. It was time to test this out.

"Alright. Sue, begin the combo sequence! Docking approved!"

"Gotcha! Frame dockinggg!" As Sue yelled, a spear-like object flew in from the sky. It was Gungnir, the flying boat.

Then the armored train, Laevateinn, kicked up dust into the air as it barreled in from the rear.

At the same time, the multipurpose underground tank, Mjolnir, burst out from the ground with its mighty drill.

Laevateinn wasn't technically a train, since it floated a bit above the ground and didn't use rails. *It's kind of similar to a linear motor train... I guess? Nah, not really... They're not alike at all.*

Mjolnir didn't actually drill the earth in front of it, either. It just used magic to displace the earth in another area. The drill was little more than a snazzy decoration for the most part.

Basically, Mjolnir used **[Storage]** to shift the earth in front of it out of the way, and then put it back in the space behind it. So it could move through the earth without actually making tunnels. It was capable of using the drill, but that only really happened when it initially entered the earth and rose up out of the earth. Its design was based on something in an older anime I showed them.

When all three support vehicles came together and got within range of Ortlinde, the Frame Gear would rise into the air and prepare for the combination mode. Ortlinde's specialized docking system allowed it to combine with the three support units and enhance its power. Mjolnir split itself into two and fused with Ortlinde to become its legs.

Then Laevateinn split itself into two and stuck itself on to the end of Ortlinde's arms and created longer limbs.

Lastly, Gungnir would swoop down and fold itself into a V-shape before docking on Ortlinde's back. After that a mask would pop out of the Frame Gear's chest and land on its face, and its horns would start emitting light. I questioned the need for a gimmick like that, but whatever.

"Behold our true power! Ortlinde Overlord!"

Seriously...? Ortlinde Overlord? These guys are just getting out of hand now. What kind of tacky naming convention is that?! The earth shuddered as the uh... Ortlinde... Overlord, thing, crashed to the ground. The mighty hero finally made its debut.

The lumbering golden god descended upon the stage. It was twice as big as a regular Frame Gear. It was absolutely a symbol of pure power.

“Wh-What the...”

“It’s huge... Can that thing fight?!” The Felsen army stared in disbelief. Honestly it was enough to even blow me away, so I could understand what they were feeling.

“Here we go! Cannon Knuckle!” The Ortlinde Overlord’s right arm detached and rocketed toward one of the Armored Golems. It was a thick lump of orichalcum and phrasium that hurtled through the air at impossible speeds, shattering the Golem to pieces.

The right arm, which worked similarly to the Fragarach system, swung around in an arc before pulling back and clicking back on Ortlinde’s elbow.

You guys even made that...? Talk about getting carried away! Installing a Fragarach is fine and all, but you remodeled it into a goddamn rocket punch? I imagined that this was Doctor Babylon’s doing. She probably said something like “this needs more punch!”

The Ortlinde Overlord suddenly charged into the heat of battle. Its body was massive, but it still moved with a startling level of speed. This was because it was enchanted with **[Gravity]** at several key points.

The Ortlinde Overlord smashed itself into a Golem. It was then that I realized I hadn’t really designed any weapons for it. I made a mental note to put some together later on.

The Golem she’d hit fell to the ground and died immediately. The struck area had been completely obliterated. Ortlinde was an unreasonable powerhouse... I questioned whether it was wise to actually give it to Sue.

“Sue. Be a little more careful with your movements. Think about where your hits’ll land.”

“I got it! Rosetta handles that stuff anyway, don’t worry!” She answered as she made Ortlinde casually smash a Golem’s head.

Hmm... We initially planned for the vehicles to be in autopilot mode. It might be better if they're always set to manual gynoid control...

"Cannon Knuckle!!!" *... Yeah, manual's best. They can stop her if she gets overzealous. Holy crap she just wiped out a ton of them!*

The enemy had already been routed in the area where Ortlinde Overlord was rampaging. That made sense though; the very presence of the thing had completely demoralized the opposing side.

Moroha, however, wasn't going to let anyone escape. She sliced off the arms and legs of the Steel Battalion bots, and then sealed their cockpits shut, effectively trapping the pilots inside metal tombs.

A mere hour after the battle had begun, it was over.

"Milord. We've accomplished our mission."

"Excellent work. Keep an eye out just in case any enemies try fleeing. Sue and the rest, keep an eye out for any weird magic readings. We don't want anyone looting us again."

"Gotcha!" I looked over at the king of Felsen. He was simply staring in disbelief.

"I'll leave the arrest of the Steel Battalion pilots to you, alright?"

"Huh...? O-Oh, yes... Right. Leave it to us. We'll jail them, interrogate them, and such. I'm sure they'll come peacefully after seeing this one-sided victory."

With that, the dream of the Golden Order had been annihilated.

The Felsen army bore witness to the event, so news would probably spread fast. Even if the Golden Order had remnant members around the country, they'd probably keep quiet after hearing what happened here.

Naturally, we'd still interrogate the captured members here in order to find out more information on the members, hideouts, and other details.

All I did in this battle was invoke **[Meteor Rain],** so I was impressed. This wasn't a battle against the Phrase, so they would've probably done just fine without me.

I looked up at Sue's Frame Gear with a smile on my face. The rising sun shone against its glimmering gold.

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All the members of the Golden Order had been successfully rounded up, including the sub-leader. With that, the organization was done for.

Upon being caught, all the members were informed of the truth about the **[Sanctuary]** spell. After learning that, most came quietly, apparently crushed by the news. Even though it was far too late for them, they realized the futility of their plans.

They looked miserable, but they were just reaping what they'd sown. Their efforts had resulted in the deaths of many, and their ambitions would've killed even more. I had no sympathy for them at all.

Those who had committed serious offenses were immediately put to death, those who committed lesser offenses were given fifty years of hard labor in the mines.

In regards to the Steel Battalion, it seemed that Galzeld's Magic Corps operated separately from Bowman's Magitechnicians, so all knowledge about how to create them was confined to Bowman and, to a lesser extent, his team.

Still, it's not like the two would be able to make anything 'proper' compared to a Frame Gear even if they worked together perfectly.

Bowman had been publicly executed in Roadmare already, and Galzeld's execution was already scheduled. There were definitely magitechnicians and engineers that had some vague ideas of how the Steel Battalion was put together, but they were all in custody. I had a good feeling that I wouldn't be seeing any of those machines around ever again. Nobody with that kind of knowledge was around anymore, after all.

Then again, they'd been built, so it was possible that someone could reverse engineer something from that which had already been reverse engineered. It was entirely possible for knock-offs of knock-offs to appear, or maybe even knock-offs of those knock-offs of knock-offs could sprout up in the future.

"Trash is trash at the end of the day, but I'm honestly impressed he managed to create such an effective bastardization of my Frame Gears."

"That's right, ma'am! It's crude as heck, but still impressive in the worst possible way! I'm amazed to the point where I can't even think of how he did it, yessir!" Both of the Babylon twerps jeered and shook their heads as they looked at the wrecked mech.

Y'know if you two keep bitching about the Steel Battalion any longer, Bowman's vengeful ghost might float over here and whine. I'd just use ***[Banish]*** *on him, though. No biggie.*

We took the preventative measure of trashing every member of the Steel Battalion we could find. I really didn't want to find out that someone stole one and made an even shoddier version.

Felsen was thankful to me for sweeping the dark matter under the rug. My reputation in Yulong, on the other hand, had gone down even further...

I'd gone in disguise, but Yae's Schwertleite and Hilde's Siegrune stuck out like a sore thumb. Everyone who saw the incident now believed the Silver Oni to be an agent of Brunhild.

The people of the capital were happy that the Heavenly Emperor was dead, but they weren't thankful that it was me that had done it. They probably didn't appreciate that I had barged in without formal declaration and just done what I wanted.

It's not like I did it for the sake of the people of Yulong or anything, but even so... It was a little disappointing to not be appreciated. It's not like I needed their thanks, but it still would've been nice to have.

Yulong was absolutely not gonna recover as a nation at this point, and that suited me just fine. They'd have to rely on foreign aid to pull themselves back up, and no nation on the continent wanted to offer them anything like that.

There already wasn't enough food to go around in the central provinces, so most Yulongese citizens were moving outwards towards towns on the borders of the other countries.

Those towns effectively relied on those external countries to survive, so it'd only be a matter of time before the territories were absorbed by Roadmare, Felsen, Horn, Hannock, or Nokia.

Xenoahs maintained its typical non-interference policy, but that was nothing new. There weren't as many immigrants heading up that way anyway; the climate was rougher and the food that their people ate took quite a bit of getting used to.

Plus, there were no major towns near the Xenoahs border anyway.

Either way, a lot had happened, but I felt like I could finally relax a little.

I wanted to take some time off, but there was still enough left to be done that it wasn't possible for me to totally rest...

“So what will you guys be doing now?”

Sonia, Rengetsu, and Jesty were staying in the Silver Moon for the time being, I decided to visit them. Their quest of vengeance was over, after all, so I had a feeling they’d be moving on.

“Well, we’re adventurers... And we happen to have heard about a certain set of ruins accessible from Brunhild. So we were thinking of settling down here for a while and tackling quests here in order to make some extra money. Sound good?” Sonia and Jesty nodded along with what Rengetsu told me. I was completely fine with it. Having talented adventurers like them around would surely be a boon.

I asked them to keep quiet about what had happened in Yulong. But I didn’t really think they were the types to brag about having killed one of the prospective Heavenly Emperors of a foreign nation.

In all honesty I wanted them to join my knight order. They were absolutely strong enough... But I held off on the invitation because I didn’t want to tie them down.

I waved goodbye to the trio and then started wandering off.

“Oh, milord. Taking a lone stroll, today?”

“Ah, milord! Got some tasty apples for sale!”

“Milord! Wanna play spinning tops with us?!” A bunch of different townsfolk from all walks of life greeted me as I strolled along. It wasn’t really possible for me to go around without attracting attention, but I didn’t mind too much.

Everyone had seemed to default to calling me ‘milord,’ though. Felt almost like a weird nickname. They weren’t trying to mock me or anything, so it was fine. They were just finally getting used to my hands-on approach.

The Duchy of Brunhild only had one town. So in a sense, this town *was* Brunhild. If the town became any bigger, it'd absolutely be Brunhild's capital city.

I decided to head out east. There were a bunch of rice paddies there, because it was the site of our farming operation. Environmentally speaking, that area of the country was similar to rural Eashen. Honestly the whole place felt like a Japanese farming village. The water wheel I had installed there also added to that aesthetic.

"Things are looking good here."

"Ah, milord. Visiting little old me?" Lakshy the alraune was taking a little break beneath a tree. She was ostensibly a member of our knight order, but most of her duties these days were agricultural.

She was a demonkin species rooted in plant life, after all. She was the ideal person for the job. It was for this reason that she was allowed to skip out on most regular knightly duties.

Our knight order had around a hundred members, but around forty of those weren't actually combatants. They were assigned to other areas. Some tended the land like Lakshy, some worked in clerical positions, some worked as covert intelligence, some in construction, and so on.

Still, that didn't mean they were weak. They were still people who had passed my examination process. They still trained on their own in their spare time, too. It wasn't like they could farm or paperwork shuffle their way out of a conflict if it came to them.

"We'll be expecting a heavy haul of rice in the fall."

"Looking forward to it. Is there anything troublesome going on around here, by the way?"

“Uhm... Lemme think. Oh, I guess I was a little concerned because it hasn’t rained much in the past couple days. But it’s not like you can fix that, milord...”

“Descend, O Water. Blessing of the Heavens: [Heavenly Rain]!” The pitter-patter of water fell down to the ground as the heavens opened up. There wasn’t a cloud in the sky, but rain fell all the same, localized entirely on the farm. In the past I’d made a mistake in regards to the range, but I’d since honed it to the point of selecting the area.

The farmers in the field seemed a little confused at the sudden rain, and even more confused at the **[Shield]** spells I’d manifested above their heads. But once they saw me they just shrugged as if they understood it was one of those things, and sat down a bit to relax.

Lakshy looked on in wonder before turning her attention to me once more.

“Goodness me... Is there nothing you can’t do, milord?”

“There’s a lot I can’t do, Lakshy. That’s why I rely on you and everyone else.”

Doing everything myself is no way to live. I’m glad that I can depend on others to build my nation with me. Doing it alone just isn’t right. Old man Naito, Kousaka... Lakshy, and everyone else. You guys are the ones that actually run this country. The best thing I can do is keep you all safe while you keep on moving forwards. I won’t forgive anyone that targets this nation or its people. If anyone wants to start shit for no good reason, like Yulong, I’ll come down on them like a ton of bricks.

The rain finally ended, and I headed away from the farmland.

I decided to visit the recently-built school. There weren’t any students in attendance yet, but Fiana and the two other recently-hired teachers were cleaning up their respective classrooms.

The two new teachers were a female human in her 20s, and a male elf. He looked young, but he was an elf... I later learned he was apparently over two-hundred years old. That still made him younger than Doc Babylon and Leen, though... which felt a little weird.

The woman was named Miette, and the elf guy was called Leisail. Miette had gotten a formal education in the Regulus Empire, and then made her way to Brunhild. Leisail was a mage, and apparently quite the veteran adventurer. He was hired on Relisha's recommendation.

Yumina used her Mystic Eye to determine whether or not they were good people, just in case. They were both deemed to be pure of heart.

I was heading over to greet them, when I suddenly noticed a clowder of cats in one of the schoolyard corners.

"What in the..."

The cats were surrounding a cardboard box. Stood atop the box, on his hind legs, dictating to the group in some foreign tongue, was none other than Mr. Mittens...

"Meow meow meow. Yeow meow. Meow! Meeeeow!"

...Cat language? What the hell is he saying?

"The hell's going on here, Mr. Mittens?"

"It's D'Artagnan! And I'm acquiring pawsitive infurmation from my informeowants here."

Your informants...? You became king of the strays, now? Well, Kohaku still outclasses you.

"And what are you gonna use that information for, huh?"

"Fur security purrposes, of course! The school's my territory, so I'm gonna protect my venerable benefactor from harm!"

...Since when was this place your territory? Well, whatever. Using cats to get information on suspicious happenings is actually really smart. If anything happens around here, then a stray cat has a good chance of seeing it. Good job, Mr. Mittens.

"Well, alright then. If anything weird happens, let Sakura know."

"You got it, meow." I hadn't summoned him, so he didn't have a telepathic bond with me. He still had a link with Sakura though, so if he informed her, she could phone me right away.

As I pondered the effectiveness of a cat spy network, my phone began to ring. *Huh. A call?* I took my phone out of my pocket and saw that the caller was none other than Doctor Babylon. *I have a bad feeling about this...*

"'Sup..."

"Touya, Touya! I think the next one should have a transformative function that allows it to shift from humanoid form to a more battle-oriented form...!"

"Master, Master, sir! The next one should be a supercarrier battleship that can transport all the Frame Gears at once, yessir it should!"

"There should be A-Parts that slot into B-Parts...!"

"If Ma'am Sakura's Frame Gear uses singing to create oscillation attacks, then...!"

Shut up! The moment I picked up the call, I received a flood of screaming from Rosetta and Regina both. I instinctively pulled the phone away from my ear. *I really shouldn't have shown you guys any anime... You're just making whatever the hell you want! God damn it.*

Well, I'm a dude, so I can understand their excitement... It's honestly a little bit jarring when I see girls get so fired up about giant robots. Maybe I've been thinking about this from the wrong angle the

whole time. The two of them started blabbing and asking more details about some mecha shows they'd seen.

I didn't want to go into too much detail, since some of the giant robots they asked about worked on nuclear fission, and I absolutely didn't want that kind of technology getting introduced into this world. I knew Babylon would up and make something like that if I was too detailed.

In the end, I sighed in defeat and moved the phone far from my ear, but I could still hear their chattering voices...

Chapter IV: L'Etranger from Another World

Much to my surprise, Mr. Mittens's cat patrols proved to be effective.

If they spotted trouble, they immediately informed the nearest guard checkpoint and called over the peacekeepers. If they saw something suspicious, they tailed them and kept an eye on their actions. They also got the attention of adults when their kids were doing dangerous stuff.

They managed a lot, all without the ability to speak. The townspeople ended up being so thankful for the cats that nobody minded them being all over the danged place.

Usually a large increase in the amount of cats would mean fish might get stolen, or stray fighting would break out... But I never heard anything about that. Apparently Mr. Mittens was quite the skilled leader... When it came to cats, at least.

There were occasional incidents where traveling adventurers would try to treat the cats poorly, but they'd always end up being found in back alleys with their clothes shredded to pieces. Their bodies were found covered in scratches, as well. The number of injuries implied they'd been attacked by a considerably sized group, too. The amount of adventurers that tormented animals for fun sharply declined after a few of these incidents. Cats were animals, but they were still capable of retaliation. It seemed like most of the adventurers who fell victim to these attacks ended up being so afraid of cats afterward that they packed up and left town shortly after.

Thus, the cats had earned their rightful place in Brunhild.

"What's suspicious about this person, anyway?"

“Well...” Mr. Mittens and I were lurking in the shadows, watching someone sitting in the guild bar. Fiana was with Sakura at the castle, so Mr. Mittens was off guard-duty for the day.

This alleged suspicious person was slowly drinking sake at the edge of the bar. I couldn’t see their face, because they were wearing a dirty, hooded robe, but I definitely considered them female instead of male. That was just my gut instinct talking, though.

Her hands and legs jutted from the robe, and I could see they were clad in armored gloves and greaves. That led me to believe she was a knight.

I guess if the cats found her suspicious, then there was cause for concern... but I didn’t think we needed to be so guarded. I didn’t want to intrude on her personal circumstances. She might have had her own reasons for her disguise.

“She’s plenty suspicious, but the purrcise thing about her that bothers me is that... She doesn’t smell of anything.”

“No scent? Huh...”

“Everyone smells of something. At the very least, there’s sweat and body odor. Purrfume is often used to cover that up, but having no smell at all is pawsitively unusual.”

That made sense enough to me. Cats might not have had a sense of smell as acute as a dogs’, but they could still smell better than humans. From what I heard, cats used scent to judge the quality of their meals, and also to mark their human owners with their own smells by rubbing against their legs.

In other words, if the cats found her smell suspicious, then it was probably suspicious.

“There are three purrfectly valid possibilities here.” Mr. Mittens suddenly raised three of his ‘fingers’ into the air. He was surprisingly dexterous for a cat.

“Firstly, the scent is being masked with magic. Like maybe with an artifact or something, meow. Secondly, she’s undead. But then she’d smell like death at least, so that’s not likely. She could be a spirit though, that would still count... And then there’s the third option! She could be a Golem or a magic construct. But I’ve never seen a Golem her size before. That’s why I think option one is most likely.”

There were Golems known as Flesh Golems that were made of bodies, kind of like Frankenstein’s Monster... But they still counted as undead creatures. They’d surely emanate the stink of death.

If her scent was being erased by magic, I couldn’t even begin to think why she’d do that. I didn’t even know a spell like that existed, but there were definitely Null spells with all kinds of uses. One would use a deodorant-style magic if they stunk really badly, but this town was equipped with public bathhouses... If she could afford to drink sake in a bar, she could definitely afford to take a bath.

“She hasn’t done anything, right? All she’s done is... lack a smell.”

“You’re too optimistic, meowlord. If you wait until she does something, then it’s already too late, right? We need to act before then, don’t you know that?”

Really...? She’s just sitting there drinking sake, it’s not like... Oh...? Two drunk adventurers suddenly walked over toward the hooded woman. It looked like they were trying to pick a fight. She definitely stood out, so it wasn’t too surprising that she’d be confronted at some point...

I briefly wondered whether or not interfering was the right thing to do.

Just as I was about to make a move, one of the adventurers harassing the woman was blasted away in the blink of an eye. I was taken aback. He ended up being flung out of the bar completely, crashing headfirst into the ground. The hooded women had barely made a move.

The man was pretty damned big and tall, so the woman must have been packing serious strength to fling him so far.

I poked my head inside again, and almost got hit by the second adventurer, who was hurtling out the door in much the same fashion. *Whoa!* I pulled back and watched in awe as the man crumbled to the ground near his friend. Then, I looked back into the bar and saw the hooded woman had returned to her glass of sake, seemingly unfazed by what had just happened. The woman had serious balls, it seemed.

“Hey, you piece of shit!”

“Who do you think you are, huh?!” The two men stumbled to their feet, drew their weapons, and tried to get back into the bar. They were completely drunk. It was time for me to step in.

“That’s enough. Take it any further and there’ll be trouble. A bar fight I can understand, but the moment weapons come out I can’t accept it. Put your weapons away.”

“What’s that, brat?! You a friend of the hooded idiot?”

“Get the hell outta my way! You wanna get messed up?!” They were seriously treating me like a child. I wasn’t a seventeen-year-old anymore, but physically I hadn’t really aged in the last year or so, so sometimes people treated me like I was still a kid. It added further credibility to the idea that my Divinity had somehow halted my aging. I might have even become an immortal, but I wasn’t in a hurry to test that out.

“What’s going on here?”

“There’s some adventurers causing a fuss.”

“Wait, that’s the grand duke!” A crowd had gathered without me even realizing it. There were some kids waving to me, even.

“Go get them, milord!”

“You can do it!”

“Go beat them up, milord!”

Wait, no... That’s not what this situation is!

I sighed slightly and gave a dismissive wave towards the kids, they seemed a little disappointed by my pacifistic intentions, but then one of the drunks tried to slash me.

“Grargh!” I dodged him, but his attack would’ve missed anyway. His whole posture was bad and his feet were unsteady; he was steaming drunk.

Either way, he was a risk.

Paralyzing him with a bullet would do the job, but I didn’t want the crowd to think I’d just murdered someone. I decided to take him out conventionally.

I dodged his next attack and touched him with a spot of **[Paralysis].** The other man saw his comrade go down like a puppet with its strings cut. He charged at me with his blade, but I used **[Power Rise]** to catch it between my fingers and snap it off. It was a cheap weapon, evidently.

“What the...?!”

Then, I used **[Paralysis]** to take the second guy out.

“Hmph...” Just after I took them out, Guildmaster Relisha came out to see the commotion.

“Your Highness? What’s going on out here?”

“Ah... I just took down two violent drunks. They’re adventurers, so give them a formal warning, if you could.”

The guild couldn’t oversee everyone who decided to become an adventurer, but they still had the power to punish them if they did something that harmed the guild’s general image. Such punishments could range from taking treasure away, all the way to revoking a guild card. I’d even heard rumors of a secret guild assassin squad, but those weren’t proven.

“Got it. I’ll give them a stern warning. If they do it again, we’ll treat them more harshly. That being said, trying to attack a monarch is a grave offense, and would usually warrant the death penalty.”

“Well, I’ll let them go this time.” Some members of the guild came out and dragged the two fallen men inside. They were paralyzed, but they could still see and hear everything around them. Which probably meant they knew who I was, now. Their faces had gone completely pale. They looked a lot more sober than they had a few moments ago.

“I have a question.”

“Whuh?!” I let out a startled cry at the mysterious and unexpected voice from behind me. The source of the voice was the girl who had been drinking at the bar. *...I didn’t notice her at all, what the hell? Her voice is definitely female, but even so...*

“You were referred to as Your Highness and the like. That makes you this country’s sovereign, does it not?”

“Er... Sovereign’s a weird way to put it, but yes, I’m the grand duke.”

“Then that means you are Morcheezooki Towya. Am I right?” I nodded awkwardly at the woman’s words. Even if her pronunciation was a little stilted.

What the hell is this? Is she another foreign assassin? But she doesn't look like she's from Yulong...

"We must talk. Privately. I won't take much of your time."

"...Alright." I was a little reluctant in following someone this suspicious, but I didn't feel any hostility from her. I was also curious in exactly what it was she wanted to tell me.

It felt strange walking behind the hooded woman, but I was finding it hard to put into words. It was like following a robot. There was no feeling in the way she moved.

I left Mr. Mittens behind, and she took me to the eastern area of a nearby forest, close to a river.

She looked around to be sure there was nobody else in the vicinity, and she dropped her hood. Her face was fully exposed.

"What...?!" I instinctively jumped back and reached for my gun, leveling the sights on the woman immediately. The face that my gun was pointed at was absolutely beautiful; she was one of the most beautiful girls I'd ever seen.

But that wasn't the problem. The problem was her red eyes. Her red eyes and hard 'hair,' the way the sun glittered and reflected from the top of her head. The way she shimmered much like the creatures I'd seen in Roadmare, and then later on in Xenoahs.

"A Dominant Construct...?!" *Shit, how did one infiltrate Brunhild?! The sensors didn't go off!*

"Please wait. My intention is not to fight you."

"...What?" *You don't want to fight? What?*

"I am Lycee. If you are this Mocheyzuki Tooya, then you know Endymion, do you not?"

"Endymion...? You mean Ende?" *He had a name like that? Man...*

“Endymion has not yet returned from the space between worlds. The effort should not be monumental. That is why I would like to request you retrieve him.”

“Retrieve...?” I was extremely suspicious of this chick and had no idea what to think. Suddenly the girl, Lycee, threw something towards me from beneath her robe. It was a small triangular prism, around ten centimeters in length.

“If you pour magical power into this... Then Endymion shall be called here, apparently.”

“Apparently?”

“That is what Endymion told me. I have never tried it. I lack what this world refers to as magical power. He said that if I was ever to be in trouble, then I needed to seek out the sovereign of Brunhild. Mochizukey Tohya.”

What the hell... This chick is definitely a Dominant Construct, so why’s she working with Ende? Isn’t he an enemy of the Phrase? Is this a trap, maybe? I glanced over to Lycee with suspicious eyes, but I read no emotion on her at all. Still, something about her felt different to the other two I’d encountered before.

I poured a little of my magic into the prism, but nothing really happened. *Is it broken...?*

After that failure, I gradually increased the amount of magic I was pouring into the prism, until I’d filled it with about a tenth of my total magic. Then, it shattered into several tiny shards.

“Whoa!” I pulled my hand back from the splintered prism, and the debris floated up into the air to form a large circle. Ende suddenly appeared inside the middle of the circle, passing through it almost like it was one of my portals.



“Ah. Touya, huh? About time... You really saved me. If you hadn’t done that, it would’ve been another half-year or so before I could come back. Thanks... Man, I’m back now, Lycee.”

“I see you’ve returned, Endymion.” Ende smiled as if nothing out of the ordinary was happening. His scarf fluttered in the breeze as he set foot upon this world once more.

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“Man, where should I even start...”

“Tell me everything. I’d like to know all the details from the beginning.” Ende began speaking as he sipped his freshly-brewed tea. We were both sitting in my castle. Lycee sat next to him, sipping her own tea much in the same way she had been sipping her sake earlier.

The only other person in the room was me. I wasn’t keeping anyone else in the dark, I just wanted to be sure of the situation first. It was serious.

“That means I might end up talking for a while, is that fine?”

“That’s fine. Let’s start with something simple. That girl, Lycee. Is she one of the Dominants?”

“She is, yes.” Ende continued to sip at his tea.

“The Dominant Constructs are the highest tier of the Phrase species, right?”

“That’s correct. Lesser Constructs, Intermediate Constructs, Upper Constructs, and Dominant Constructs. Above them there is only the Sovereign. The Dominant Constructs, as the name suggests, exert dominance over anything lesser than them. They also have higher capacity for intelligence and emotion. Well, they’re not very good at the whole emotion thing, mostly.” He flashed me a wry smile as he looked from Lycee to me.

“Let me just get one thing straight, then. This girl isn’t an enemy, right?”

“The concept of an enemy depends on circumstances, Touya. If you and your allies decided you wanted to kill the Sovereign, then that would make us your enemy.” Ende glanced at me, a subtle hint of challenge in his eyes.

“Are you one of the Phrase, Ende?”

“I might’ve mentioned it in the past, but I’m simply one who crosses worlds. I’ve been called many things in the past. A drifter, a Shift Walker, l’etranger... The list goes on. I was born in a world that exists ‘higher’ on the ladder of reality, at least compared to this one. I have the ability to traverse worlds, up and down, but only worlds ‘below’ my own. I don’t have omnipotent power.”

So he can move between worlds... That’s an incredible power, honestly... Still, he said he can only cross to lower worlds, but I wonder if that means he could visit Earth, too...

“During my travels, I found myself on a certain planet. It was the world the Phrase came from. The Crystal Planet, Phrasia. It was there that I met the Sovereign Phrase. Though the title is gender-neutral, it might be best to refer to her as a queen in this sense. She was a woman, after all.”

Huh... The Sovereign Phrase is female?

“We spoke with one another about many topics. We spent many years together on that world... It was nice. Eventually, she, well... She wished to live with me. I too, wanted to spend the rest of my life with her. But my people, the Drifters... We simply can’t settle down. We can’t chain ourselves to one world. We Drifters are driven by the sense of exploration and freedom that a new world brings. That’s why she decided she would come with me. There are geniuses in

other worlds, after all... And it took her some time, but she came up with her solution. Her method to traverse worlds."

That makes sense. Just because a world is lower on a ladder doesn't mean it's necessarily inferior. The scientific advancement on Earth is far beyond the stuff in this world, but the magitech stuff that can be applied here is leaps and bounds past some of our stuff. We can't instantly heal any wounds on Earth like they can here with magic, after all. But still... traversing worlds like that...

"So you're telling me she became the Sovereign Core, breached the boundary of worlds, started to absorb power from people in the new worlds, and used that energy to climb upward... Right?"

"Right. Her hypothesis was that if she reached the heights that I originally came from, she could acquire a method to become an existence like me. Then, and only then, would we be able to live a full life together. That was her plan." Ende looked downward, casting a sad frown to the floor. Lycee didn't seem to pay much attention. She was munching on Lu's cookies like a small woodland creature. Small, cautious bites. She was fine with the sake, fine with the tea, and now fine with the cookies... But she ate really slow. I wondered if she had ever tried these things before. I turned away from her and looked back to Ende as he spoke up once more.

"The Dominant Constructs protested this, of course. The most vehement of her protesters was the one that I encountered the other day, Ney."

"You met Ney, Endymion?" Lycee stopped her slow gnaw to question her companion.

"Hm? Oh, yeah. She's looking healthy."

"I see." Lycee shrugged and began eating the cookies again. She wasn't expressing much in the way of emotion, but it seemed like she was familiar with Ney to some extent.

“Yeah. I was attacked after that actually, by one calling himself Gila.”

“Oh, that guy? He’s a total hothead. He’s one of the people after her power, y’know.”

Yeah that doesn’t surprise me at all. He seemed like a pompous kind of guy.

“Back to the story... the Dominants protested her decision to travel across worlds. They all had their reasons, of course. Some were scared for her safety, some wanted to keep her strength in the world’s ecosystem, some simply wished to take her power for their own. The Sovereign is the lifeblood of all Phrase, and gives them their supernatural resilience. Without the Sovereign, all Phrasekind would lose that power. They were scared of what might happen. None of them realized that all they had to do was agree on a new Sovereign to keep the species unified. Even if they didn’t have the same power she had, they could still go on. She hoped that they’d come to realize that in time, and left the world of the Phrase with me at last.”

“So it was like you were eloping because her family protested the marriage, huh...?”

Ende smiled a little bitterly at my comment.

“I guess that’s an appropriate analogy, yes. I didn’t kidnap her or anything, we simply wished for the same thing. We did fine for a while. We ascended worlds together. When her core made a pit stop in order to gather enough energy, I would while away my days exploring the new world, meeting people and visiting places. I was alone, but she was with me in spirit. When it was time for her to move, I would move with her. Once she emerged from the body of the local lifeforms, I could sense her presence, and I knew it was time to go. But then one day, something unprecedented happened. The Phrase began invading a world that we were staying in.”

“Wait, wait. You mean the other Phrase gained the power she had to move across worlds?”

“In a sense, yes. She tried several different methods of crossing the boundary. The easiest was to tear at the fabric between worlds, and force her way through. But she and I agreed that such a method was risky, and decided not to employ it. Shattering the boundary of a world’s protective barrier would leave that world completely vulnerable to external threats, after all. We wanted to avoid the loss of innocent life in our pursuit of greater heights. That’s why she became a core in a death-like state, and used a more benign method to travel. But a certain faction of the Phrase back on the home world discovered the more dangerous path, and began forcibly ripping down worlds to come after us.” What came to mind was the image of Ende running away with the daughter of a mafia Godfather, and the criminal goons coming after him in violent pursuit.

Naturally in that kind of story, the hero would be shot to pieces if they were ever found.

“We left that world before they could find her, and we escaped unscathed. But we later learned that the world we fled from was completely annihilated. It was then that I met with Lycee, and she informed me of what was going on. Since then we’ve been chased, trying not to stay too long and hoping others wouldn’t get harmed.”

“I understand how you’re traveling, but what about that girl... Lycee? How about her?” I didn’t get it. If Ende could bring someone with him, then why did the Sovereign bother entering a near-dead state?

“I can bring one or two people across worlds with me, it just takes a little longer. But what the Sovereign... What she wished for wasn’t simple movement. She wanted growth, evolution. She wanted to move alongside me, not just because of me.” That made sense enough, kinda. It was more like her goal was to be reborn, go from

Phrase to another being entirely. In a sense, that made her similar to me. Only I'd achieved it.

But I'd been directly changed by God Almighty himself. If she was slowly ascending the spiral staircase of world hierarchy, then I'd taken the express elevator straight to the top and been granted special privileges.

"We'd been ascending the worlds one by one, but they've been lurking outside each world, getting the timing right and attacking us right as we leave the protection of the barrier. There are worlds with stronger boundaries than others. Any time we were in a world with a weak boundary, they'd pour through and try to reclaim the Sovereign. Many of the worlds were capable, too. A lot of races from other worlds were capable of fending them off. Naturally, I lent them my aid as well. Just like I've been working in this world, too. I've been killing them wherever I can, holding them back and preventing them from hurting her. Finally, we reached this world, some several thousand years ago... And it was here that a massive Phrase invasion happened."

That was the great invasion from five-thousand years ago, then... So Ende really was here back then.

"I had to step in at the time, too. The Sovereign was very close to being found, humanity was being razed pretty hard. I fought as hard as I could, but I was only one person. Lycee didn't assist me."

"I have no intention of raising a hand to my kin. I simply wish to see where the Sovereign arrives in the end."

"She's just like that..." Ende shrugged a bit. Lycee clearly had no intention of fighting against the Phrase.

"Back then, the boundary protecting this world was completely shredded. The Phrase poured in, overflowing and destroying everything in their path. There were Dominant Constructs all over,

too. It was a full-scale invasion. Humanity and the beast races were unable to do a thing. Honestly, I was going to give up. I was going to find the Sovereign, take her with me, and leap to another world. But just as things reached their lowest... the barrier was repaired. I don't know how or why. But I knew that there was something I could do. I used my abilities to move all Upper Constructs and Dominant Constructs outside the barrier. Just like I did to Ney the last time, but on a much larger scale. But the strain it put on my body caused me to lose my powers for five-thousand years. I was no longer able to traverse worlds. I was trapped between worlds, floating until now. After I moved us all outside, the people of this world diligently killed all the Lesser and Intermediate Constructs, apparently. Then, after my powers returned, I came across you, Touya." Ende's long-winded explanation took me by surprise.

This is a pretty broad scale, holy crap... How many worlds has he been through, I wonder... Just how long has he been alive...?

"I think it's unfortunate that in attempting to prevent other worlds from coming to harm, you actually herded danger toward them."

"Indeed. I won't excuse myself here. If we hadn't come here five-thousand years ago, many people would've survived. We've been sacrificing the safety of other worlds, of millions of lifeforms, for our own selfish ends. But there's no way we could stop now. We've come so far, to stop now would be an affront to our original promise. I will take her with me, no matter what. Even if every world becomes my enemy." Ende's determination danced along his gaze. He was determined, but oh so irresponsible. He was selfish, and she was selfish. They really were only considering themselves. But he acknowledged that and owned up to it, and still carried on. I couldn't admire him for that, but I could respect the incredible willpower he required to live with such guilt.

“Now you’ve heard my story, Touya. What will you do with this knowledge?”

“...Really there’s nothing I can do about the situation as it is. This world will end if it comes to the point where the Phrase acquire the Sovereign Core, because they’d likely have to slaughter millions to find it. Taking care of you wouldn’t do much, honestly. I don’t want the Phrase to kill us. I’ll wipe out any Upper or Dominant Constructs as they come to us. No matter what you want to do, that’s what my plan is.” I stared at Lycee as I made my declaration, knowing full well she probably didn’t want her ilk to die. In response, she opened her mouth.

“I cannot approve, but neither can I stand in your way. If you truly must do battle with my kin, then I will remain an onlooker.”

Guess that means she won’t do anything even if I declare war. Good.

“Then you won’t complain if I commit genocide against the Phrase?”

“We are the species that moved to attack other worlds to begin with. We are immoral. If the Phrase must die for their hubris, then I will accept that as my species’ fate.” Part of me wondered if she wasn’t fighting so that she wouldn’t be killed, too. The Phrase wouldn’t go extinct so long as she was alive, after all.

Oh, wait... There’d still be some Phrase hanging around on their home world, I think. The ones attacking this world are separated from the original species, after all. Like a rogue force.

“I would like anyone targeting my Sovereign to die. I’m more than happy with making use of your strength to let that happen, Touya. In fact... I have a question for you... Are... Are you really a human from this world, Touya?” He hit me right in the sore spot. But as a Drifter, he could probably recognize some parts of me that didn’t fit here.

“...I’m not, no. I wasn’t born in this world. That being said, I can’t travel across worlds like you can. I consider this world my home now.”

“You can’t pass through worlds...? Then how did you come here...? Oh, were you perhaps caught up in some kind of natural disaster? A random drifter, then?”

“Well, something like that...” *If you could consider god himself a natural disaster, then yes.*

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The Sovereign Phrase was in a state that was much like death, so she was probably unaware of what was going on. In the end, those people who were pursuing her to take her power away looked like nothing more than creepy and shameless stalkers to me.

Even so, I feel like if she’d given herself up, the other worlds would’ve probably been safe. I think she should’ve spoken to them more before, honestly.

Apparently, Ende had advised her on this and had her appoint a successor before they left, but she was simply too talented a leader for a lot of the Phrase to accept the new leader. The Phrase home world divided into two distinct factions. Those that obeyed the will of the new leader, and those that did not. The ones that did not acquired the power to forcibly travel through worlds, and began their pursuit of their Sovereign.

It seemed there were geniuses amongst the Dominant Constructs, but none came close to her in terms of skill. It also seemed like a lot of the Dominant Constructs had their own goals in regards of what they wanted to do with her, and they were all in different minds about how to proceed.

Lycee was absolutely intent on not interfering with any side of the conflict. She moved with Ende, but offered aid to neither him nor her

species. Even so, some of the Dominant Constructs considered her a turncoat.

If you asked me, it was a little hypocritical of them to refer to her as traitor when they were the ones not abiding by the will of their leader. A bunch of annoying, hypocritical stalkers.

They honestly felt like children who couldn't bear to be apart from their caregiver.

I was reminded of something Kousaka had told me, though. That I couldn't let people constantly depend on me to fix all their problems.

If Brunhild kept on counting on me to fix everything up, they could end up messing up in the same way as the Phrase.

It wasn't my country. It was the people's country. I pledged to never forget that.

Ende's Dragoon shimmered in the morning sun as it stood in a field out of town. I'd finished patching it up, so I returned it to him.

Apparently the sensor board hadn't reacted to Lycee because she was a Dominant Construct, and our equipment simply didn't have the right parameters to pick her up. I wanted to use the chance to figure out what kind of wavelength a Dominant Construct emitted, but Lycee informed me that Phrase of her level of strength could easily mute those waves, even for other Phrase.

Apparently they kept in a state of no-wave generation in order to prevent interference with their subordinates. It was like a built-in stealth mode... Lycee was functionally undetectable, but she wasn't hostile so it was fine. I did ask her if we could record a sample just in case, but she flat-out denied me. It was a pain, but I didn't push it.

I called out to Ende.

"What now, then?"

“I’ll keep on hunting any Phrase that come through, like I have been. I’ll do it until she’s ready to leave this world.”

When’s that gonna be, I wonder... Even if we spare this world, won’t the next one just be in the same situation?

Nobody knew where the Sovereign would go next. It was likely that even she didn’t know. Ende would continue to loyally follow her, though. He’d keep on protecting her from her pursuers.

In all honesty, I wanted to wipe out the Phrase while they were still targeting this world. I couldn’t bear to think what might happen if they attacked Earth.

I understand Ende’s perspective on the matter, though. If I was forced to pick between the people I cared about or many people that didn’t mean anything to me, the older me might’ve been conflicted. But the me right now would sacrifice countless strangers in order to protect the people that matter.

If someone told me right now that if I didn’t destroy the Sovereign Core, then everyone I loved would die, then I’d fight against Ende in a heartbeat.

If our positions were reversed, I might’ve made the same decision he did. I could feel a strange sense of kinship in our philosophies.

Ende clambered into the cockpit. Lycee put her hood back on and climbed into the palm of the Frame Gear’s hand. He let the wheels fall to the ground, shifting to high-speed mode.

“Well, Touya. I’ll catch you later.”

“Yep.” The Dragoon began to pick up speed, sliding along the ground and kicking up a dust cloud. Its form slowly faded into the distance.

“Here you were, Touya.”

“Oh, Yumina.” I turned around to see Kohaku and Yumina. I’d told the others about Ende and his story the day beforehand. They were

surprised, but we still decided to stick to our current plan. If the Phrase kept attacking us, then we were going to resist them.

Yumina stood by my side as the tiny Dragoon on the horizon faded from sight.

“If... If you went back to your old world, Touya, then...”

“Hm? What’s with that line of thought all of a sudden?”

“I was thinking about it, and... If I couldn’t live with you, Touya. I wouldn’t want to go on. I would’ve looked for a method to travel across worlds as well.” It seemed like she’d been thinking about Ende and the Sovereign. They loved each other, and that was why they were so determined to be together. It was a tragedy that their determination triggered so much despair for so many people, but if I was sent back to my world, I’d do my best to meet with Yumina and the others again as well.

If I said something like “I’m trying to find a way to travel to another world” back on Earth, then they’d probably think I was insane. But I wouldn’t let that stop me. Even if I had to resort to suspicious or occult means, I’d try everything in my power to get there.

If I couldn’t live with the girls who meant so much to me, then there’d be no point in living at all.

I placed my hand on Yumina’s shoulder and pulled her into a gentle embrace.

“It’s okay. I’m not going anywhere. Even if I get whisked away to another world, I’ll come back to you. I’ll ask god, and he’ll oblige. I’m sure.”

“God, huh... It’d be nice if he listened to your prayers.” Yumina smiled softly. *Heh... I’m not kidding, you know.*

I'll protect this smile. I'll keep you all by my side, forever. I'll walk to the future with all of you, hand in hand. I'll do my very best, I promise.

I embraced her tightly as I made my quiet declaration.

"Ah, Touya." We were passing by the training field. Lu was sitting on a nearby bench and waved to us. She was dressed lightly and had two short wooden training swords by her side. Elze was sitting on the other side of her, wiping her sweaty face down with a towel.



Yae and Hilde were having themselves a fierce bout in the training area. Their training with Moroha had increased their abilities by a considerable amount. They were definitely masters of their craft at this point.

The other knights were watching them keenly from a distance.

As we walked toward the bench-seated duo, Elze looked down at the ground and muttered in a dissatisfied voice.

“Hmph... So what are you two doing? Been together all morning...?”

“Late morning. Is uh, everything okay?”

“Yeah, fine. I’m not in a bad mood or anything!” Elze, clearly flustered, wiped her red face down with the towel again. I could read her like a book. That side of her was adorable, too.

“Where’s everyone else?”

“Linze and Leen were taken off by the doctor. They’re up on Babylon right now, I think. Something about adjusting our personal Frame Gears.”

“I’d like my Frame Gear to be built soon, too.”

“Now, now. Don’t worry. They’re cooking up something that’ll perform smoothly, so you just gotta wait a little longer.” I gave Lu a smile, but she did seem a little pouty. I didn’t have a Frame Gear yet, either. Mine would probably be saved for last, though. I could go toe to toe with Upper Constructs even without a Frame Gear, after all. Plus, everyone knows you save the best for last.

As I quietly gloated about myself to myself, Sakura, Spica, and Sue came over from the castle.

“Touya!”

“Oh, Sue. Visiting today, are we?” Sue rushed over and tackled me with a hug. She lived back with her folks in Belfast, but had a ready-

to-use portal in her bedroom so she could visit whenever. She typically visited in the afternoons, though.

“Mhm. I’m your bride-to-be, you know? I can’t afford to neglect my preparations for marriage. I’m gonna stay here all day today. Also dad gave me permission to stay overnight, so I’m gonna sleep in your bed tonight!”

“Ehh... Really now...?” All my other fiancees turned their gaze to me. Their eyes were narrowed.

Sue typically stayed with Yumina when she slept here, so this was a pretty unusual demand.

“Is there a problem? Do you hate me, Touya?”

“I don’t hate you, Sue... It’s just a little soon for that. I-It might be bad for my reputation, too...”

“Your reputation? We’re just sleeping with one another...” Sue innocently tilted her head to the side, it seemed like she had no idea what I thought she had an idea about.

Welp, I get it. What Sue is thinking about is... different from what I’m thinking about. Not that I was gonna do anything anyway, though! I began to sweat slightly, I gave Yumina a sidelong glance, silently begging her for aid.

She noticed and grinned softly. Then she began talking.

“You know, Sue... Sharing a bed with a single man, fiancee or not... Doesn’t reflect well on him or you. You’re a noble, remember?”

“Is that how it works, Yumina?”

“It is, it is. That’s why we all need to sleep with Touya at the same time. That way there won’t be any issues.”

“Waiiit, what?!” *What the hell did you just say, Yumina?! There’s no way we can do that!*

“Hold on, hold on! Where’d you get that idea?!”

“Why not? We’re just gonna sleep in the same bed, right? Is that such a problem...? Or did you have... Specific intentions for us?”

“...Hmph.” I couldn’t counter Yumina’s perfect attack. *I guess just sleeping is fine...*

“W-Wait, Yumina! Does that include all of us?!”

“Of course, Elze. Or do you want to be the only one left out?”

“Mhh... Ghh... I-I mean, in that case I have no choice... B-But... Ghh...”

“I don’t mind.” Sakura seemed pretty comfortable with the idea... Until I looked at her face. Despite her calm tone, her eyes were darting around and her face was beet red. Spica stood next to her with a quiet look of discontent on her face.

“I-I’m fine with it too, Touya... Let’s sleep together, it’ll be fun!”

“What’re you being so loud for, Lu...?” I quickly covered Lu’s mouth, she seemed to be sputtering in a panic.

What the hell is going on?! Someone help! This is way too extreme! My prayers were suddenly answered as my smartphone began to vibrate. It was Guildmaster Relisha, my savior.

“Y-Yeah! ‘Sup?!”

“Sorry to bother you, Your Highness. The Kingdom of Ryle has received readings that suggest a group of a thousand Phrase will soon emerge near their territory. There aren’t any Upper Constructs amongst them. They’re set to appear in around three hours.”

“Three hours?!” Typically we had a little leeway, but this had me concerned... It seemed like the world’s protective boundary was weakening again.

“They can’t take refuge or send sufficient men in, so... We have no choice but to ask you. I have permission from the king of Ryle.”

“Not a problem. Send me a message with more information and details. I’ll dispatch our knights.”

“Thanks.” I put my phone down. The hubbub from my fiancees had finally died down, and now they just had their gazes leveled on me. I was saved by a set of unlikely heroes. I really owed the Phrase one.

I gathered up the knights and explained the situation.

“The Kingdom of Ryle is expecting a Phrase invasion to the tune of a few thousand. They’re gonna appear in about three hours. We’ll head there and crush them all! Contact anyone who isn’t occupied. You have one hour to get prepared for rolling out! Dismissed!”

“Hoo-rah!” All the knights dashed out to begin their preparations. They shed their armor so they could hurry out and contact their allies.

I needed to call Lain, Nikola, and Norn on the phone to tell them what was going on. Then I needed to tell Baba and Yamagata to guard the castle in my absence. I had to hurry!

“Man, what a pain...”

“Good grief... This certainly is a bit of a mood killer, but... Let’s protect the planet! Let’s protect the planet!” Yumina grinned and made a little out-of-character statement as she looked up into the clouds.

A lot had happened since I came to this world. It was rough living here, much rougher compared to Earth.

But I loved this world. Everyone that mattered to me lived in this world. It was a world I was proud to fight for. A world I was proud to protect.

“Shall we?” All the girls nodded.

I came to this world with a single smartphone. But now I had countless friends and partners to rely on.

I'm sure a lot more is gonna happen from here onwards... But I know they'll help me through it, just as I'll help them. I know it.

With resolve in my heart, I opened up a **[Gate]** to Babylon.

As an aside, the girls all ended up staying in bed together so they could have a private chat... I ended up sleeping on the couch that night after I got back...

Interlude I: Father and Daughter

Some time ago...

“Well, now Sakura and Touya are officially engaged...” Sakura nodded wordlessly at Yumina’s words.

Babylon’s garden had several gazebos one could spend their teatime in. One of those was a white gazebo with an enneagonal shape, which served as the girls’ favorite spot. A variety of every flower imaginable bloomed proudly around the gazebo, and cool, refreshing water flowed through a nearby canal. It was the most beautiful spot in the garden.

“Now that the ninth person Doctor Babylon prophesied has appeared, there won’t be any more newcomers, correct?” Hilde spoke with a relieved expression. She was probably relieved the ninth wife wasn’t some strange, unfamiliar woman.

“I wonder. The future has a tendency to shift at times, so I think it’s too soon to be relieved.” Said Leen, sipping tea at the head of the round table with a calm expression.

“You seem fairly composed despite that, you do.” Yae furrowed her brows grumpily at Leen’s words.

“I’m just saying we shouldn’t rest on our laurels, is all. I will admit I’m no expert when it comes to romance either, but having lived ten times your lifetime, I’ve seen a good share of similar cases. Love and passion can burn out and cool, and betrayals can happen. You mustn’t take his love for granted. If you want him to always love you, make an effort to keep his love for you burning strong. Well, that’s true for both men and women.”

“Wow... You sound almost like Karen, Leen...” Lu spoke up, sighing in admiration. Leen actually had heard those words from Karen before, but continued sipping her tea with feigned calmness. Maintaining

this kind of pretense was part of being older. Despite everything, being the only one that's so much older than everyone else gave Leen something of a complex.

"In any case, all nine of us are equally Touya's fiancees. Let's do our best to make up for each other's fault as we support our husband."

"Right, right. Touya has his careless moments, after all."

"True. And I would very much like it if he could settle down and not be quite so stressed..." Lu placed a hand on her cheek and heaved a sigh.

"Is something wrong, I wonder?"

"Oh no, it's just that... Touya can use **[Gate]** to go freely from country to country, yes? And he solves problems for other countries fairly often. But countries have... procedures for these sorts of things, you see?" Even though he's in a position where one would normally negotiate with the other country for money or other such favorable conditions, Touya acted without regard for that. As far as Touya was concerned, he really was fixing their problems "on the side," an attitude Lu, who was raised as royalty, frowned upon.

"But that's part of what makes Touya who he is."

"I understand that, of course. I find that part of him to be charming, as well. I just can't help but think of what would happen if someone tried to take advantage of his kindness... It worries me."

"Touya is naive. A man of his character would normally be unfit to lead a country." Sue picked a cookie from one of the plates and wolfed it down with a gulp.

"Expecting darling to act like a king is pointless from the get-go. Even his clothes are the same ones he wore in his days as an Adventurer."

"Oh, that. I believe he said something along the lines of, 'Gaudy, sparkly clothes aren't my thing'?" Elze smiled wryly, remembering

that time. And true enough, a king's wardrobe often had gold or silver embroidered into it, making it rather conspicuous at times. But that was meant to give off an aura of majesty and wealth, and didn't have to reflect the king's personal tastes.

"I would like to see Touya in a proper outfit sometime, though..."

"Agreed. I think a knight's suit of armor would look good on him..."

"Huh? That's what you were thinking of...?" Linze looked taken aback by Hilde's response. Maybe that was the standard in Lestia?

"I saw an armored warrior the other day, but the mask ruined the whole outfit, it did." Yae folded her arms and tilted her head, mumbling grumpily.

"I think dressing plainly suits Touya just fine. I'd be more bothered if he started dressing smartly and strange women would start sticking to him because of that."

"Yes, that would be a bother." Sakura nodded gravely at Sue's words. The others all seemed to agree on that.

"Speaking of, what is Touya doing today?"

"Let's see... I believe today he's in Xenoahs. Castle Pandemonium was damaged during the Dominant Construct attack the other day, so he went to help repair it, given he had a hand in some of the damage himself..." Hilde answered Linze's question, a wry smile on her lips. Touya's battle with Gila left Castle Pandemonium in shambles. The repair work for it began immediately, and Touya willingly offered to help.

"We were just speaking about it, and here he goes again... I really would wish he would settle down for a bit." Lu sighed again.

"Shouldn't you have gone with him, Sakura?"

"The overlord is annoying, so I won't go. If I'd have gone with Touya, something awkward would have happened. I guarantee it." Sakura

averted her face sullenly. It seemed establishing a relationship with her father didn't come easily to Sakura. The overlord, who had never treated her as a father would until now, suddenly changed his attitude completely. It left Sakura in a loss as to how to treat him (even if she did know there was a good reason for that change in attitude). But more than anything, the fact the overlord became terribly touchy-feely all of a sudden left her rather creeped out.

"Well, fathers can be like that sometimes..."

"Hey hey, do you think Touya will become like that?"

"I get the feeling he will. I think you've all noticed, but darling can be really doting when it comes to family. I think he'll become more of a doting father than even the overlord the day he gets a daughter."

"Oooh, I can see that happening. He'll definitely be a doting father."

The tea party continued, the girls chatting enthusiastically about their absent fiance. This get-together would later become a regular custom for them, and would be known as the Queens' Tea Party.

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"I think it's finally coming along." I whispered to myself, watching as one of Castle Pandemonium's towers was slowly being restored to its former glory.

It was blown away by Gila's particle cannon, after all... It's a good thing there was no one in it.

I thought fixing this would take no time at all with Babylon's Workshop, but like with Brunhild's castle and the bridge on Enlush Island, it couldn't design it on its own and I had to stay behind to help it.

Specifically, I softened the stone used for building with some limited use of **[Gravity],** and manufactured some of the more subtle decorations with **[Modeling].**

“A fine job, milord. Pandemonium is being restored in the blink of an eye.”

“Oh, hello.” I turned around, lowering my head to the person standing before me. It was Sirius, the dark elf. He was the father of Spica, who was enrolled in our order of knights, and also the head of House Frennel, one of Xenoahs’ five great noble houses. You couldn’t tell all that from how young he looked, though.

The members of House Frennel have been masters of a special martial art called the Shield technique for generations, which they used to guard the overlord’s dynasty. In other words, they were a clan of bodyguards.

Every member of the royal family had one such bodyguard, of the same sex, appointed to guard them. In Sakura’s case, Spica was appointed as her guard.

And needless to say, the head of the family, Sirius, also had someone he was appointed to guard. That same someone eyed me with a sour expression on his face from behind Sirius’ back.

“Tell me, Grand Duke... Why? Why did Farnese not come with you? Since you’re coming to the Demon Kingdom, wouldn’t bringing her along be the considerate thing to do? Did you not consider bringing her mother, Fiana, as well? Such an inconsiderate brat...”

“You know...” The overlord had been hanging around for a while now, mumbling his complaints as if chanting some kind of curse.

That’s why your daughter is avoiding you, sir. I mean, I did invite her, you know? Properly asked her, “Sakura, do you wanna come with me to the Xenoahs?” And you know what she said? “No, because the overlord is annoying.” You’re the problem here.

“Now now, Your Terribleness. It’s thanks to the grand duke here that Castle Pandemonium’s reconstruction is going so smoothly, you should be thankful.”

“Hmph. I am thankful for that. You’re a great help, Grand Duke. I thank you greatly for that.”

“Don’t mention it. I had a hand in wrecking the castle, after all...” It was actually all Gila’s fault the castle got destroyed. The idiot was running around, leaving havoc in his path.

According to the investigation later, Gila appeared in the mountains to the north of here. He’d blasted a whole mountain off, and came all the way here.

The Phrase could hear people’s heartbeats, so he probably rushed here, where there was a concentration of human presence.

“Either way, you’ve restored Castle Pandemonium. It’s almost noon, so how about you join us for lunch to celebrate?”

“Hmm, not a bad idea. I still have much to ask you about my daughter, good lord...” The overlord’s hand struck my shoulder in a light manner. *Ah, y-your smile isn’t reaching your eyes... I’ve been careless.*

I cursed my own thoughtlessness. I should have never joined them for this meal. I wished I could go 30 minutes back in time and whack that idea out of my stupid head.

“What is it, Grand Duke? You’re not touching your food.”

“N-No, it’s nothing... Ahaha, this looks delicious....” I sit there petrified, the spoon I dipped into the soup in front of me gripped in my hand. As I picked the spoon up from the purple liquid, I found an eyeball, the size of a marble, floating in it. I had to praise myself for not dumping the spoon away right there and then.

At lunch, they treated me to Xenoahs’ national cuisine. Their... national cuisine. That’s an important part, so I’m repeating it twice to make that very clear.

Xenoahs' climate was inhospitable to most living things. Of course, that applied to their crops as well. This being the environment they lived in, it was customary to eat anything you can eat. And if you can't eat something, well, you make an effort to eat it anyway. Taste wasn't much of a priority; the stance was that if you can eat something, you eat it.

So magical beasts were perfectly good game, and any part of them that was remotely edible was to be eaten. The Syrupy Purple Lizard Soup and Eyeball Garnish that lay in front of me was one such piece of cuisine born of those customs.

Anyway, the eyeballs were a no-go. They might have actually tasted good for all I knew, but visually speaking - a no-go.

Yeah, I'm a wimp! Got a problem with that?! I put my spoon down, and submerged the eyeball back into the sea of soup. And this time I tried to eat just the soup. It was purple and looked like polluted marsh water, and the smell was pretty pungent too! It smelled like someone who just came out of gym class!

"What is it? You're not going to eat it?"

Urged by the overlord's chiding, I steeled myself and pushed the spoon into my mouth. For a moment, everything in my field of vision waved and distorted.

W-What even is this flavor. Was it bitter? Or no, maybe salty? Sour? I-I don't know! It was Saltybittersour! "What do you think? Good, isn't it? This delicacy's hard to come around even in Xenoahs."

"I-It's... really something... The taste is so... overwhelming, my body won't stop shaking..." My hands wouldn't stop trembling, and I was sweating profusely. Eating any more of this would kill me! I stealthily opened my **[Storage]** and took a wooden deep bowl out of it, placing it on my legs hidden beneath the table cloth. I then opened a small **[Gate]** in my mouth, carefully so he wouldn't notice, so while it

would seem like I'm eating, all the soup would be transported into the bowl. It got rid of the taste, sure, but the smell was still terrible! As I silently worked my way through the soup, the dining hall's doors opened and Sirius walked in.

"Pardon my delay, there were some documents I couldn't put off for later... Oh?" Sirius, who had arrived late, paused when he saw my plate.

"Is that the Syrupy Purple Lizard Soup?"

"Y-Yeah. It's uhh, a real treat."

"I'm surprised you managed to eat it. Even demonkin barely eat it."

"...Say what?" My spoon paused at Sirius' words.

"Wasn't this a rare delicacy of Xenoahs' national cuisine?"

"A delicacy... Well, I suppose it might be to those who like it, but the majority of demonkin won't touch it. I do recall hearing that in the distant past, a certain clan's coming of age rite involved drinking this, and you wouldn't be considered an adult otherwise. I suppose you could call it a test of courage."

A test of courage? I fixed my gaze on the overlord as Sirius answered with a smile, but he just looked away and whistled innocently. *That little... this is a crime of conscience!*

"I personally love this soup. Yes, indeed, it's a treat. I'm glad you liked it too, Grand Duke."

"Probably because your lineage can cut their sense of taste to a degree, Your Grace. Us dark elves have no means of doing that."

The lying...! This is plain bullying! Well, if that's how he wants to play this game...

"Oh, I forgot, Sakura made me a lunch so I could eat here." The overlord's hands twitched and stopped.

“O-Oh... Farnese’s handmade lunch... ha... ha... ha... My, am I envious of you...” The overlord lifted his face, a stiff smile on his face. *Oh, he’s excited, good.* I pulled a basket out of **[Storage],** took a sandwich out if it, and offered it to him.

“Would you like some, Overlord?”

“R-Really?! Since you’re offering, I suppose I could take one! It is Farnese’s handmade lunch, after all! As her father, I simply must eat it!”

The overlord drew closer to me excitedly. Heheheh... He wouldn’t cut his sense of taste when it’s time to eat his daughter’s cooking, after all.

“She said she’s really proud of how the fried chicken turned out.”

“Did she now!” I showed the overlord, who was peeking into the basket, some fried chicken at just enough distance that it was out of reach.

I handed him one of them on a skewer, and he happily put it in his mouth.

“Hmm... Buh, baa, buhhh—!” The overlord wailed at the heavens, as if he was about to spout fire from his mouth. His face was distorted in agony, his eyes were tearing and his tongue was out, like a dog’s.

“Whoops, that fried-chicken was the one Elze made. My bad...” I apologized to the overlord with a nudge and wink.

That piece of fried-chicken Elze made boasted so much spiciness, it was considered a form of torture. But despite the fact it was so dangerous, even I couldn’t bring myself to throw away something my fiancee cooked lovingly for me. I’m glad I was able to put it to good use. I’d have to keep this a secret from her, though.

The overlord grabbed a pitcher from the table and began gulping water from it directly. Unable to help himself, he filled his mouth

with the ice in the pitcher and began chewing it down. It seemed even his ability to cut off his sense of taste had its limits.

If I recall, taste was divided between five flavors; Bitterness, sweetness, sourness, saltiness and savoriness. Spiciness, on the other hand, wasn't experienced through one's sense of taste, but through one's sense of pain. Maybe that's why?

"Heh... Heh heh... That was a very... particular taste..."

"Oh no, I'm sure this soup has it beat in that regard..." We exchanged our impressions with stiff smiles. This man was going to become my father-in-law, and despite the fact he was much older than me, I couldn't help but see him as someone the same age as me. I could imagine us having a lot of these exchanges further down the line.

"You two are supposed to be ruling a country, and this is what you're doing...?" Sirius said, sighing with an exasperated expression.

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"Good, so we're all here."

"Yes. It was just a short while, but I was glad to visit home again." Everyone who was originally from Xenoahs were gathered in front of me. Lushade from the vampire clan, the lamia twins Charette and Mulette, Samsa from the ogre clan and Lakshy from the alraune clan.

Sakura refused to come, but I decided I should try inviting everyone else who were originally from Xenoahs. I invited Spica, the dark elf, but she thought there was no reason for her to come if Sakura wasn't coming, too.

It felt wrong to only give them a few hours to visit, so I put them on leave and brought them to Xenoahs via **[Gate]** two days ago.

"H-Hey, when I got me mum a souvenir, she was proper happy! When I told 'em I'm a knight in Brunhild, me little brothers were really excited."

“That’s great.”

“When we got back home, our parents kept pestering us about marriage and asking us when we’re planning to lay eggs, so we ended up running away.”

“Right?!”

While Samsa’s story was heartwarming, the lamia twins would only complain about their parents. I guess families are the same no matter where you look. But... lamias are born from eggs, huh...?

Either way, I opened a **[Gate]** to return us to Brunhild, and transported all of us.

The demonkin returned to the barracks, carrying their souvenirs from the Demon Kingdom. Those souvenirs aren’t food like that soup, are they...? Actually, the overlord had me bring back a gift too, but... He said I should give it to Sakura and the other fiancees, but should I really give it to them if it’s something like that...? W-Well, I doubt a doting father like him would send something bad to his beloved daughter.

I opened a **[Gate]** to transport myself to Babylon’s garden.

Everyone was enjoying a tea party, surrounded by flowers in their usual spot. I thought they might be here.

“I’m back.”

“Touya! Did you just get back from Xenoahs?” Sue shot up from her chair and rushed to greet me. Whoa there, no tackling!

“I managed to fix Castle Pandemonium, somehow... Geez, that was a mess.”

“Good job, and welcome back.” Linze thanked me with a smile. *Yep. Just this makes all the work worth it. Oh, I almost forgot to give them the souvenir.* I pulled a box of thick paper from **[Storage].**

“Sakura, this is a gift from the overlord.”

“If it’s got some long-winded letter attached to it, you can throw that away.” *Geez. She’s weary of you, Overlord. I mean, does he really send her letters?*

Come to think of it, I did give Xenoahs a Gate Mirror, so it wouldn’t be strange if Kousaka got letters from them. Kousaka might have transferred a letter to Sakura from the overlord. ...I somehow got the feeling it was thrown away on the spot.

“There wasn’t a letter... Huh? There is one.” The envelope attached to the side was the same color as the box, so I couldn’t tell. But it didn’t seem to be some long-winded letter.

I peeled the letter from the box and flipped it around, finding a writing on the other side: “To the grand duke’s ladies.” It wasn’t addressed to Sakura.

He means Yumina and the others... right? Though they’re not technically “my ladies” yet.

While I stood there, perplexed, Leen snatched the letter from my hands and opened the seal. That was nimble.

“I will send you some of Lady Farnese’s favorite treat. I hope you will all enjoy it. Signed, Swellra Frennel...?” Once Leen had finished reading the letter aloud, Sakura pulled the box towards her and undid the ribbons.

Inside was a large, round pie, decorated with red raspberries on top.

“My! It looks delicious, it does!”

“A raspberry pie, I see!”

“Hmm. Swellra used to make them very often. It’s my favorite.” *Right, Swellra is Spica’s mother, and Sirius’ wife... which means it’s not a gift from the overlord, but from Swellra? Why didn’t he say so, then...?*

“Looks like she made us two.”

“I’ll have the other one later with Mother and Spica, then. This one is for everyone.”

Makes sense. Miss Fiana and Spica would definitely want to have some of this pie, too.

We were ten people, myself included, so we would have to cut the pie into ten pieces. That was a bit annoying. *Oh wait, wasn’t there an app for cutting a cake into equal pieces?*

I looked it up on my smartphone and found one immediately and downloaded it. I then put the screen over the pie, and after marking the guide lines that appeared on the screen, cut it into ten neat pieces.

Everyone took a plate and received their serving of the pie. And as we worked on the pie, Sue poured me a cup of tea.

“Let’s eat.” I cut a piece of the pie with my fork and carried it to my mouth. It was delicious. A bitter-sweet flavor and aroma spread in my mouth. The pie was great, but the raspberry was delectable all on its own.

“It’s so good!”

“Delicious, I say! It’s crunchy and scrumptious!”

“It’s great... Mmm... I wonder if I could make this, too...” Lu alone seemed to be appreciating the pie from a different angle, but it looked like everyone liked Swellra’s pie.

“This brings back memories...” Sakura savored the pie, a faint smile on her lips. Sakura was raised in the Frennel house, so to her this cake’s flavor must carry the memories of a warm household.

While the girls noisily discussed the raspberry pie, I noticed a piece of paper folded in two attached to the inner side of the box’s lid.

Wondering what it was, I took it out, finding a letter signed by the overlord that just said, “If you come back to Xenoahs, you could eat this everyday”.

Overlord... doesn’t trying to seduce her back with food... strike you as kind of petty...? Looking at how happy Sakura was, I decided it would probably best to not show her this letter. If she found out the overlord tried to take advantage of her memories with Swellra, she’d only reject him all the more vehemently, and I didn’t want her to do that, either.

“What is it, Grand Duke?”

“Huh? Ah, no, it’s nothing.” I smiled at Sakura’s dubious expression and crumpled the paper in my hand. *The next time I meet the overlord, I should probably advise him to avoid doing that.*

I think he’s anxious to win back his daughter’s affection to make up for all the time he wasn’t involved in her life, but the more he tries to force himself on Sakura, the more she’ll draw away from him. As they say, slow and steady wins the race. Taking the time to gradually deepen their relationship would be a better way of going about it, I think.

“Sakura, how do you feel about the overlord?”

“He’s annoying.”

...There’s a way to go until that bears fruit, though.

Interlude II: Doctor Babylon's Strange Love

Brunhild was getting bigger every day.

The country itself was only a small Duchy, but it occupied enough space that it still took several hours to walk through.

Still, the castle town was steadily expanding and the citizens were slowly flowing in as well.

Children ran around the town, from east to west, as construction operations constantly saw the town increasing in size. Old man Kousaka was dutifully overseeing the expansion, putting his experience as one of the Takeda Elite Four to use.

"Hoho... It's getting pretty lively. I like it!" A little girl muttered as she walked through the castle town streets, her white lab coat trailing behind her.

This girl was none other than the creator of Babylon, the creator of the Frame Gears... Regina Babylon.

Today she wanted to see the surface world, so she was looking around.

"Is that white coat of yours alright?"

"Yup, don't worry about it. It's enchanted with **[Protection],** so it can't get dirty. It's all good!"

Uh... That's not really what I was worried about... It's kind of dragging, someone could step on it!

"The doctor is not interested in conventional clothing, master. It's better not to bother her with such matters." Cesca, the Terminal Gynoid of the garden, stood next to us both and talked to me.

The doctor was her former master, so it seemed like they had a good understanding of each other. I didn't really question it.

"Ohh, what's that?!"

Doctor Babylon suddenly pointed towards a group of children playing with spinning tops. *Huh, didn't they have those in the ancient world? Oh wait, I introduced them to this world, didn't I...*

"Heh, you seem like one of the kids when you're like that." Linze smiled softly as she watched the doctor run over and investigate the situation. I didn't think it was so sweet, though. I knew she was a devil in disguise.

The doctor quickly lost interest in the spinning tops and charged off in another direction. She must have found something else.

She approached a young woman who was browsing vegetables at a nearby grocery stall. She slowly snuck up to her, and then did the unthinkable.

"Whoosh!"

"Eek!"

"What?!" Before I knew it, the doctor flipped up the girl's skirt. We were treated to a dazzling view of white.

"The hell are you doing, you idiot?!" I charged over to the doctor and thwacked her on the head. *It's not child abuse if she only looks like a child!* Linze and I apologized to the young woman before trying to move on. The girl dismissed it as the behavior of a naughty child, but I still felt pretty bad since I knew the truth. We quickly left, as Doctor Babylon had found another thing to look at.

"That hurt, you know. I'm just an innocent kid, gimme a break."

"Liar! You're a fully grown adult, you witch!"

“Now now, don’t get mad. You’ll end up all tense...” Before I knew it, the doctor’s tiny hands were cupping my butt.

“Enough!”

“What?!” I pushed away the pervy doc in a flash. I didn’t like how deft her motions were. It was like she was used to it.

“Any more crap and I’ll send you straight back to Babylon!”

“C-Come on now... It’s just a little bit of fun.”

“I’ll let you know what’s fun or not... GWAH!” I felt a pressure on my behind once more.

“Oh, how nice...”

“QUIT IT!” I snapped in frustration as Cesca, the pervy maid, was doing just what Doc Babylon had been doing a moment ago. I forgot that she was a facet of that old perv’s personality. I had to keep my guard up around her, too!

“.....”

“...Linze... Please stop squeezing your hand like that.”

“Huh? O-Oh, ahaha...” I noticed that Linze’s hands were subconsciously clenching open and closed. I didn’t want her sexually harassing me too, that’d be too much.

The doctor pulled out one of the mass-produced smartphones from her breast pocket and pointed at the screen.

“The map here says there’s a bar, but where’s the brothel?”

“We don’t have one... And even if we did, you wouldn’t be allowed in.” In this world, you were considered an adult once you turned fifteen. You could drink sake, you could gamble, you could even go visit a brothel.

This world didn’t have much in the way of gambling. It had betting on races and stuff, but in terms of card games it was pretty limited. I didn’t really play cards anyway, though. I liked to do the one where you flip them and match the pictures.

We didn’t have any casinos or gambling tracks, but I saw groups gather together in the corners of the bar to gamble now and then.

There were a few brothels and gambling dens in the bigger cities in other nations. Money and women tended to pile up a lot there, and it was typically a recipe for trouble.

As far as my knights went, I didn’t really want to make too much trouble for them. But maybe a place to gamble responsibly would be a good idea.

“Oho. I can tell by the look on your face that you’re thinking about building a brothel now, right? Or a gambling den? Something fun, for sure...”

“Don’t put words in my mouth! Don’t try to read my mind, either!”

“Touya...?” Linze gave me a cold stare in response to the Doc’s words. She was a girl with a pure heart, so she took nonsensical things at face value sometimes.

“Wait, Linze. Don’t believe her lies. You really think I’d plan something like that?”

“Sigh... N-No, I don’t. I trust you...”

Guh... I’m glad she believes me, but she still feels oddly distant about it.

“How miserable...”

“You truly are spineless, Master.”

“Pipe down, you idiots!” *Shut your mouths! You caused this trouble to begin with!*

“Linze is your fiancee, isn’t she? Why aren’t you being more touchy with her?”

“What?” I stare down the malicious doctor as she started spewing nonsense again.

Guh... Enough of this. You’re gonna sour my mood.

“Are you two gonna be alright? You’re not flirty at all. Do I have to get worried about you two?”

“Damn you... There’s not a problem here!”

“U-Uhm... I-I wouldn’t... I wouldn’t mind if we flirted a bit more! Just a bit, I mean...” Linze’s face was beet red as she sputtered out the declaration.

I-I feel the same, you know?! I was just trying to be polite! Linze shuffled up to my side, and took my arm into hers. Didn’t take long for her to cling on to me. *U-Uh, Linze...? You’re getting pretty close there...*

“Ohohoho... That’s more like it.”

“Uhuhu...”

What’re you two muttering about? Well, whatever... This isn’t so bad.

We walked like lovers as we continued on our stroll.

“Ah, milord. Enjoying your stroll?”

“Oh, Linze. Seems you’re having a nice time.”

“Hey, you two! Wanna buy some apples? I’ll make ‘em cheap!” This was a small country. We were already well-acquainted with the people and surroundings. Linze’s face remained red as we walked; seemed like she was still feeling pretty shy.

“Don’t worry too much. We’re engaged, you know? This is only natural.”

“...Yeah. I’m happy.” Her face was still red, but she flashed a gentle smile. Doing this was nice from time to time. The road was long and winding... Or at least that’s how it felt. We were just slowly walking together.

“Hmm... I’m a little bored, though... Brothels aside, what do people do for fun around here?”

“We have a baseball field. There’s a racetrack nearby, too.”

“A what?”

Oh, right. She won’t have any idea what that is, huh. I thought about explaining it, but it’d be faster to show her. If I recalled correctly, there was a match scheduled between the knight order team and the shopkeeper team.

Seeing is believing, after all. Let’s head over there.

A loud thwack resounded throughout the air as the bat hit the ball.

“Run, run! Wait, stop!” The running man stopped at second base.

The game was proving entertaining enough. It wasn’t a big match like Belfast vs Regulus, but it was still plenty enjoyable.

“Hm... A ball game, eh? This is quite interesting, quite interesting indeed. Is it perhaps from the other world?”

“Yeah, it is. It was a popular competitive sport in the country I was born in. But it originated in a nation that was across the sea from me.” I personally had only played baseball as part of mandatory physical education. One of my friends was part of the school team, so sometimes I asked him for pointers.”

“There was a popular game back in Partheno... You’d get this big ball, and throw it at the enemy team.”

The doctor held her arms out, emulating the size of a volleyball. *Throwing...? Like dodgeball?* “You had to keep the ball balanced,

because if it ran out of magic charge it'd explode. You got points for making the flashiest kind of explosion. You'd lose if you couldn't stand up again after ten seconds."

That's nothing like dodgeball at all... Is that seriously a ball game? Seems more violent, like boxing. As we chattered, the player at second base made it to home plate. The audience cheered joyfully.

We rented out the stadium for a fee. It was a small fee, mind you. Everyone shared it, so people typically chipped in a little bit each to rent it out for games.

There were some kids playing in a nearby dirt lot, too.

"I'm glad that civilization is still flourishing. After the Phrase invasion, things looked pretty bad back in the day."

"How much damage did they do, exactly?"

"Mm... I don't know the details because I fled to the sky, but... Most of the countries were wiped out. The bigger the nation, the harder it was hit. The Phrase flocked to where people were, after all."

That made sense. The Phrase would go towards areas with more people due to being able to hear the beats of their hearts. We were sitting in a VIP box and it was just us, so we didn't have to worry about talking about sensitive matters. Linze spoke up.

"Doctor... What about your home country?"

"Oh, yeah. Partheno was totally busted. It was a massive nation that occupied about a third of the continental territory, but it died out relatively fast. I was safe. I took the few people I cared about up to Babylon and called it a day."

"Partheno was doomed from the start. That idiot king made a stupid request. He just wanted to escape and leave his subjects to their fate." Cesca added on a little bit of commentary.

He tried to run away? What idiot king?

“He asked us to hand over Babylon as an emergency evacuation shift for the royal family and aristocracy. Can you believe that crap? He seriously thought I’d hand over my most amazing life’s work just like that. I was more disgusted than angry at him, honestly. I had no time for his nonsense.”

“That king was nothing but a coward. He ended up abandoning his people and running away. He was absolute filth.” It was rare to see Cesca get annoyed about something. She seemed to really have a distaste for him. Then again, I’d also hate a cowardly king who’d just leave his people to die.

It seemed like Cesca and Babylon both hated the king for trying to steal the floating fortress away, but their feelings seemed more like disgust than anything. I wondered if that disgust that Regina had felt was an emotion that flowed into Cesca when she was born.

“Well, I used transportation magic to evacuate a large number of Partheno civilians. The problem was that we were a magic civilization. The Phrase were our natural counter. Magic was ineffective against them. Most of our weapons were magic-based, so we couldn’t put a scratch on them.” Well, they still had dwarven power armor and artificial lifeforms like Golems, so there were still some ways they could fight back. It just didn’t seem like it was enough.

That kind of power was fine for Lesser Constructs and maybe even Intermediate, but it wouldn’t do anything to Upper or Dominant Constructs.

“That’s why I started creating the Frame Gears to begin with. But the Phrase retreated before the first proper one was created. I ended up scrapping the project and sending the completed ones to the hangar, but I’m happy to see that they’re seeing use nowadays.” She didn’t know the Phrase would come back five-thousand years later, but she

still had enough foresight to keep the Frame Gears she'd built as a just-in-case precaution.

"The future is more important than the past, anyway. Five-thousand years ago, the nations of the world were very hostile towards each other. It wasn't a situation where we had a chance. Hell, some world leaders actively tried to route the Phrase into the territory of other nations. There was a lot of blame going around about who was responsible for them, too. The countries in this era are way more calm in comparison. I think they might even be able to fight back against the Phrase if they all unite."

Well... There's a certain country that still thinks I summoned the Phrase, so it's not all that different... Although it's not like you could call it a functional country anymore. As I pondered quietly, the doctor pulled her smartphone out from her breast pocket. *Hm? You got a message?*

"Seems like we're done tweaking Sue's Frame Gear. I'll head back to Babylon at once."

"Aright. Let's go check it out." I opened up a **[Gate]** within the VIP box and let Linze, Cesca, Doctor Babylon, and finally myself pass through to the hangar. The Doc and Cesca both had the ability to warp back to Babylon within a limited range, though.

When I walked into the hangar, I immediately saw Sue's special Frame Gear, the Ortlinde. It was shining golden and standing right in the middle of the place.

A bunch of wires were coming out of the cockpit and leading into an egg-shaped device on the ground in front of it. It was a Frame Unit, a high-tech simulator.

The screen above the Frame Unit was displaying the current simulation. Ortlinde had just joined together with its supporting vehicles to form the Ortlinde Overlord.

“Tsk... This isn’t ideal...” Monica nodded slowly as she watched the screen. She seemed to be operating a console via a nearby touchscreen.

“Hm... It’s faster than manual mode. Does that mean we can do it with Sue alone, now?” The Doc stood behind Monica and commented on what she saw. There were a lot of things being displayed, but I didn’t get it.

“Are you perfecting the auto-combo?”

“Mhm. We’re like, totally almost there thanks to the data from the recent fight, and stuff. We should be able to combine without manual riders in the vehicles.” Monica pushed another button, and the Frame Unit egg popped open. Out hatched Sue herself.

“Woo! It was perfect!”

“Understood. I’ll like, totally set it to auto mode and stuff, then. Come back again when I’ve finished the tweaking.”

“Sure thing! Thanks, Monica!” Monica stood on a nearby lift and ascended towards Ortlinde’s cockpit.

“Good work.”

“Yeah, good job.”

“What the, you two’re here?!” Sue came charging over toward us. Sue was showing startling promise in terms of Frame Gear piloting. She was a kid, so it was probably getting wired into her development.

“Doctor... Are-a you in here...? I wanted-a to talk about... WHOH” Parshe suddenly appeared out of nowhere and she immediately tripped over. Over nothing.

That’s a talent! As she tripped, a few bags she was carrying sailed through the air. Cesca caught every one.

Parshe almost completely tumbled, but just about managed to right her balance at the last moment.

“Classic Parshe. But man, even I’m not that bad... How’d you turn out like this?”

“Ehehe... I guess it’s-a one of those things.” Parshe smiled sweetly and scratched the back of her head.

I don’t think that was meant to be a compliment...

“What brings you here, did you break something again?”

“Well, I found-a these magic bags in the Storehouse... But I-a wondered if-a they were broken.”

*Magic bag? Like a bag that works similar to my **[Storage]** spell? That sounds neat. I think Olba from Mismede would appreciate it. He’d probably get a lot of use out of one.*

I had briefly considered renting out my **[Storage]** service as a way of bringing in money.

Doc Babylon took one of the bags from Cesca and looked it over.

“Hm... Did I make this?”

“Come on... You really can’t remember?”

“This is simply how Doctor Babylon operates. She builds until she wears her brain out. She can’t be expected to remember all of her amazing inventions.” Doctor Babylon turned to me with a grin, as if to accentuate Cesca’s words.

“I’ll just use **[Analyze]** on it. That’ll do it.” That certainly was a handy spell...

“Hm...? Oh... Interesting...”

“Is it broke?”

“Hm... Yep, seems like it. I’ll fix it in a bit.”

Huh? What's with that blunt answer? That almost seemed too innocent. What are you hiding from me, doc? I was about to press the matter, but Sue tugged at my sleeve.

"Touya, Touya... I'm hungry. Let's get some food."

"Oh, it's noon already." Linze checked the time on her phone. I had thought it was earlier in the day.

I said goodbye to the gynoids and opened up a **[Gate]** to the castle. The last few times I made a portal directly to the kitchen, one of the staff ended up getting a fright, which usually made them drop a saucepan or something. That's why I decided to walk to the dining room like a regular person for once.

We met up with Lain on the way there, and she was busy training. We asked her to lunch, but she politely declined and went back to work.

"I wonder what's for lunch today... Crea's cooking, so I'm sure it'll be good."

"Lu's been cooking a lot in the kitchen lately, too. Her stuff is gradually becoming just as tasty as Crea's." Sue and Linze exchanged idle conversation as we made our way down the hall. Suddenly I noticed Yumina running towards us. She looked flustered. It was rare seeing Yumina in a panic. Her face was red, too... And she was holding her skirt down. I wondered what was wrong.

"T-T-T-Touya! I know you're a man, and men are interested in such things, but... P-Please have some restraint! D-Don't do that to me in public, at least!"



“Huh?” Yumina’s face got further flustered, but I had no idea what she was talking about.

“L-L-Look... Please just return them... That kind of thing is private. You’re the ruler of a nation, y-you can’t just go... s-stealing pairs...”

“Wait, seriously! What are you talking about? What got stolen?”

What?! Why are Sue and Linze staring at me now?!

“Touya... Did you seriously steal them? You’re that brazen...?”

“You wanted to do something that badly, huh...?”

“Th-That’s wrong! I’m innocent here!” *What the hell?! Why would I steal underwear from my fiancee! I’d never need to stoop that low!*

“Wh-Who else but you could steal my underwear while I was wearing them...?!”

“What?! They came off you while you were wearing them?” Yumina, who was somehow becoming even redder, stared me down. I couldn’t escape from her piercing gaze.

Stealing underwear from underneath the clothes... It was definitely possible if I used **[Apport]** or something...

“Oh, I see. Touya’s **[Apport]** could do it, huh. When were they stolen, Yumina?”

“A little bit ago. I decided to head to the dining room... O-Only Touya could do something like that, right?”

“Touya’s been with us the whole time, though... And no underwear appeared in his hands.”

“H-He could’ve stashed it in **[Storage],** no?” I was unable to prove myself innocent against that allegation. I was the only person who could use **[Storage],** so I was the only person who could see what was in there.

“Eeep!” Just as I tried to profess my innocence again, I heard a shrill shriek from down the hall. It was Lu’s voice. *Don’t tell me...*

Lu suddenly hunched over and charged over towards me.

“T-T-Touya! You can’t just steal a woman’s underwear, you know?! Even if you love them that much, you could’ve asked me! You can’t just take them off me while I’m wearing them!”

“Stop! It’s not me! It wasn’t me, damn it!” *Why do people immediately assume it was me?! I know I’m the most likely person to perform weird feats, but don’t assume I’m like that! I’m innocent!* Yumina continued to stare me down. Her gaze was focused on my hands, for some reason. I flailed my arms in response.

“I guess it wasn’t you, Touya...”

“Thanks for finally believing me...”

“...It wasn’t Touya?” Yumina turned to Lu and nodded. If it was me, then Yumina would’ve surely noticed a pair of panties materialize in my hands.

“You didn’t use **[Mirage]** or **[Invisible]** to mask them, did you?”

“No, I didn’t... Throw me a bone here, Linze?”

“W-Well, it’s true that I didn’t sense any magic use.”

Obviously you didn’t... Because I didn’t use any! Gaaah! Do you guys seriously believe I’m at the center of some convoluted panty-stealing plot?

“Hm? Elze and Yae are running over here too?”

“What?!” I turned in response to Sue’s words and saw both Yae and Elze hurtling down the hall at mach speed.

“Don’t you move, Touya! I’m gonna get you!”

“T-Touya-dono! You have infringed upon my honor, you have!”

“Wait, no! You’re misunderstanding!” *They’re not listening at all!*

“Gah... **Come forth, Wind! Softening Enclosure: [Air Sphere]!**” I used a wind spell to wrap myself in a cushion of air. Elze and Yae, upon making contact with the bubble, had their reckless charge reduced to a slow meander. I was safe.

“Elze, Yae, please calm down! Touya isn’t the underwear snatcher.”

“How do you explain my disappearing stuff, then?! Only Touya could possibly do that!”

“I-It happened at the training grounds, it did! How did you do it from such a far distance?!”

“Lu’s underwear was also stolen right in front of us. Touya isn’t the culprit, we promise.” Yumina gave the necessary evidence to prove me innocent. The two incensed girls gradually calmed down and came to accept that I wasn’t the criminal here.

“Then... Where did our underwear go...?” Every girl here except Linze and Sue had lost their undies.

Wait... There are four girls here without any underwear on, huh...? H-Heh...

“Wait, did you just imagine something weird?!”

“Huh?! No! I promise!” Elze was turning red either out of anger or shame. She was getting pretty aggressive. Naturally, I couldn’t admit what I had been thinking of. Not if I valued my own life.

“Wait. Can’t you use your smartphone to search up the stolen underwear?”

“Oh, you’re right.” Even if the criminal had hidden them, I’d be able to track them so long as a barrier hadn’t been erected around them.

I took out my smartphone and opened the map app. I specified the entire local region in my search.

Huh...?

“.....”

“Where are they, Touya?”

“No, I haven’t searched yet... I need to narrow down the terms first.”

“Isn’t searching for stolen underwear good enough?”

“It has to be something I’d recognize at a glance. So I couldn’t do that.”

How am I supposed to know if underwear is stolen or not at a glance?

“Oh, then how about Lu’s underwear?”

“What are you saying, Sue?!”

“Won’t work either. I can’t recognize Lu’s underwear from anyone else’s at a glance.”

Maybe if her name was written on it... But man, if I could recognize Lu’s underwear at a glance I’d probably get in trouble.

“Hmph... Then what about Yae’s? She wears that Eashen underwear, right?”

“S-Sue-dono?!”

“No dice. There area lot of Eashenese people in this country, after all...”

Plus, even men wear fundoshi. It’s too broad.

Hmm... Underwear that vanishes, let’s see... Was someone trying to lower my reputation? Or... Maybe they just wanted underwear. Wait... WAIT.

The gears in my brain began to turn, and I suddenly remembered something.

“That bag... It wasn’t a magic bag of holding at all!” I opened up a **[Gate]** to Babylon immediately. I knew who the culprit was.

“Ohoho... Leen sure wears adult underwear... How lacy. I’m not surprised, given her age.” I watched as Doctor Babylon put her hand inside the alleged magic bag and plucked out a small, lacy pair of black underwear. She gently set it down on the hangar’s console desk. There was a variety of other underwear pairs there, too.

The little girl gleefully stared at her collection, but she truly emanated the aura of a dirty old man. The same vibe came from the pervy maid standing next to her.

“I see. So the bag gives you ability to replicate my **[Apport],** huh?”

“Well, it’s slightly different in principle. It was originally designed to pick fruits in orchaaaugh!” I grabbed her by the scruff of her labcoat and picked her up. I picked her up and made her look at the red faces of all the girls she’d wronged.

“Ah... Ahaha... Hey there... Y-You’re not mad, right?”

“Of course we’re mad!” The girls angrily gathered their underwear from the desk. I turned away as this happened. I kept my eyes tight shut. There was apparently quite the collection of underwear on the table, so it was evident she’d gone after more fiancees than the girls in our immediate company.

“Ah, well... I was just doing some research, you know?”

“What kind...?”

“Uhm... My capitalistic hypothesis on the idea of a futuristic economy built on color and forms of girls’ underwear...?”

“Liar.”

“You’re in big trouble.” I wasn’t sure where to look.

I focused my glare on the pervy maid.

“I had no part in this. It was all Doctor Babylon’s idea.”

“You’re selling me out?! Traitor!”

“My master is Mochizuki Touya. Sorry. I don’t speak this language. Who are you?” Cesca clinically responded to the friend she had so evidently betrayed. She sure was impressive in how cold she could be...

“You watched and didn’t stop it?”

“I wasn’t ordered to stop it.”

Damn... I guess that’s fair.

Ah well... This isn’t my business. They can deal with her. I left Doctor Babylon’s fate in Yae’s hands, handing the girl over to her.

“This is how we have punished bad children since ancient times, it is.”

“Hey, I’m mentally older than you, you know! What are you even gon... What?!” Yae pushed down Doctor Babylon against the console desk and deftly rolled up both her labcoat and her skirt. Then she rolled the girl’s underpants down her legs, exposing her bare behind.

“W-W-W-Wait a second now! You don’t need to pull down my underwear, what are you doing?!”

“Without shame there is no punishment, there is not. I hope you take this lesson to heart, I do.” Regina struggled desperately, but Yae was holding her down in place.

Yae raised her hand and firmly brought it smacking down against the doctor’s rump.

“Hyah!”

“Argh!” The punished doctor let out cries of anguish. She was being hit a bit harder than I expected. I thought the point of this kind of punishment was humiliation instead of pain.

“Hyah!”

“Gngh!” *Are you trying to hit her one time for every pair of underwear she nabbed? Not that I care, but this is going pretty far...*

“Hahhh... Mh... D-Don’t worry... Her body’s the... Mmh... S-Same as us Babylon Sisters... She’s plenty s-sturdy... S-So don’t... Mmfh... Worry...!”

“Uh... Sure...” Tica appeared next to me, dabbing at the bloody fountain leaking from her nose. She was staring at Doctor Babylon’s behind. I wondered how she knew what was going on, but I assumed they had some kind of information sharing network. A pervert like her was hardly gonna pass up on the chance to see this kind of thing.



Sue instinctively hid behind Yumina's back when she saw Tica. I was glad she knew real danger when she saw it.

"Hyah!"

"Ooof! Mmh!"

Hey... That noise was a little weird. Is this seriously a punishment... Or is it a reward?

"A little girl getting humiliated by an older, more mature girl?! It's perfect, oh yes... Oh baby, mfh...! Wooo!" Tica suddenly yelled out, causing everyone to freak out. I freaked out too. I wanted out of this hellhole.

Doctor Babylon sat on the edge of her chair, liberally applying a few bags of ice to her red rump. Even if her body was sturdy, pain and damage could still pile up on it.

"Gaaah... Don't hit me again...!"

"Are you done with this nonsense now? I'm getting pretty tired, honestly."

"I had good intentions! I was going to give them all to you as a present, Touya!"

"Stolen underwear is a terrible gift!" I found myself yawning. It had been a busy day.

I felt like I should've spent the day resting instead of... All of this. Still, it seemed like this was my life now.

Afterword

Howdy, it's Patora Fuyuhara again.

We've finally made it to volume ten of In Another World With My Smartphone. I'm pretty happy, honestly.

Now that Doctor Babylon's on the scene, this world's gonna see a lot more smartphones.

In the past, I was the kind of stubborn person who thought relying on a phone was no good.

I was a bit of a contrarian, and I acted like I had no need for a cellphone for the longest time. But then one day I found myself in a cellphone store, thinking it might at least be convenient to use for work purposes.

After a few hours, I came out of the store with a top-of-the-line brand new smartphone. It was either that the salesman was extremely good at his job, or I was just really gullible and dumb. It was probably the latter.

Either way, now I'm the kind of person who can't go without using his smartphone. What kind of person did you used to be compared to now? I don't think I'd have ever started writing this if I'd never bought a smartphone, honestly.

Right now the anime should be coming out pretty soon, it's pretty rough to think about. The couple months between finalizing volume nine and ten went by in the blink of an eye.

Anime aside, a lot of people have been hosting events and campaigns related to the adaptation. I'm really amazed at the outpouring of support I've had, it's emotionally moving and I'm extremely thankful.

At the time of writing this might be a little premature, but I'd like to thank the animation staff. I'd like to thank all the voice actors, too! You've totally breathed life into my characters. It's been a happy few months.

Let's get to our usual thanks! As always, Eiji Usatsuka, thank you so much for supporting me for a full ten volumes of amazing illustrations. Thank you for all you've done so far, and thank you for all you'll do in the future.

Tomofumi Ogasawara, your mech designs have been exceptional as always. I'm sorry for describing Sue's so fancifully... I imagine it must have been inconvenient, but you did a wonderful job.

K, as always. Thanks for sticking with me up until this point. I'm looking forward to continuing our work together.

Thanks to everyone in the editorial and publication departments.

And thank you so much to everyone who stuck with my books this far. Truly, you've made the last ten volumes a memorable experience.

Patora Fuyuhara

Bonus Short Stories

Cat on the Town

“Hey, someone get that guy!”

A man was running alone through the streets of Brunhild Castle Town. There was a stolen wallet in his hands as a fat merchant screamed at him. This man was a thief. He’d been scoping out the area and his eyes had fallen upon the merchant’s coins. When he spotted an opportunity, he took action without delay, swiftly stealing the goods. The man was fast on his feet, so there was nothing the overweight fellow could do to stop him.

The thief was certain he had gotten away with it, but it was at that moment that a small creature jumped out from the shadows.

“You meowlevolent man! Taste my blade!”

“Huh?!”

A veritable Puss in Boots appeared before the man from the shadows. The cat held a rapier in his right hand, which he thrust toward the man’s crotch. In a flash, the thief fell to the ground.

“Auuugh!”

“If a scratch against your pants is all it takes to best you, then mew better be thankful I afforded you the same mercy I would grant to kittens.” The wallet fell to the ground, much like the man’s pants, as he remained on the floor. His hair fluttered in the wind, alongside the tatters of his ripped clothing. He was defeated by a brave and valiant soldier, of course. One of the town guardsmen quickly approached the scene, but his service was no longer needed.

“Enough out of you!” The guard restrained the fallen man, then turned his blade on the cat, Mr. Mittens.

“Stop right there, criminal scum!”

“Who, me?! A crimeownal?!”

“A talking, bipedal cat?! That’s far too strange, I say! You’ll have to come with us!”

As Mr. Mittens raised his paws in defeat, his savior appeared out of nowhere.

“Are you okay, D’Artagnan?”

“V-Venerable Mother!”

“Aren’t you the teacher...?”

It was Fiana, Sakura’s mother and the head teacher at Brunhild’s school. She was carrying a brown paper in her hands. Mr. Mittens had originally come to the marketplace with Fiana, as he had appointed himself her sworn protector. It was then that he heard the merchant calling for help, and gave chase. After that, he gallantly pursued the criminal and made him taste defeat.

“Ah, sorry... This is my daughter’s cat...”

“Ma’am, are you aware that your daughter’s cat can talk? Ah, wait... Forgive me! I didn’t realize who he was...”

The guard came to the sudden realization that Fiana’s daughter was Sakura, and Sakura was the fiancee of Touya. Touya was, of course, the grand duke of Brunhild, so causing trouble for his family-to-be wouldn’t be good. He hurriedly gave the woman a panicked salute, turned away from Fiana, and dragged the criminal away by the seat of his pants.

“It only took one mention of the princess to turn him away tail between his legs... She really is the top cat around here...”

“Don’t worry, D’Artagnan. The town will get used to you soon enough... There are all kinds of people here, after all.”

People from all over the world converged upon Brunhild, so it surely wouldn't take long for them to accept a talking cat knight.

《Mr. Mittens, where are you? With my mother?》

"Hm...? Did the princess just send me a thought...?" Sakura had summoned him to begin with, so there was a telepathic bond that linked the two. Nobody else but them could tap into that connection.

"Was it Farne? What did she want?"

"Ah, yes. Let me just paws a moment... She sent me a message saying that she and Lady Spica are at the school."

"Goodness me... We should hurry back, then."

"Allow me to hold your bags, Milady."

"Ah... Thank you!" The woman smiled gently, and the valiant cat returned the gesture in kind.

Later on, the people of Brunhild would come to learn of the presence and power of the cat knight that lived in their midst... But that is a story for another day.

The Enneagram

Thanks to you, dear reader, I have finally reached ten volumes of In Another World With My Smartphone. You have my heartfelt thanks. This is also the tenth time I've written something personal as a bonus, woohoo... Ah, well. This time it's not really a personal anecdote or anything. It's a little something related to my work, actually.

Have you heard of the Enneagram of Personality? It's a way of classifying human nature into nine separate personality types. The time has come for me to finally reveal the truth! I based the nine heroines of this series on those nine types.

Type 1: The Perfectionist

In short, this type of person strives for perfection. They have the ability to judge things well and have a well-rounded idea of balance. Their sense of righteousness is also quite strong. They're capable of caring and have strong leadership qualities. As far as Smartphone heroines go, this one falls most in line with Yumina.

Type 2: The Giver

A person that wants to help others. An attentive person who overflows with compassion and interest. They find it easy to empathize with others and don't feel the need to be thanked for their good deeds. As far as Smartphone heroines go, this one falls most in line with Linze.

Type 3: The Achiever

A person who wants to do things right the first time. They see their goal and make a beeline for it. They do all they can to work toward what they want, never once looking back. As far as Smartphone heroines go, this one falls most in line with Lu.

Type 4: The Individualist

A person who only follows their own code. A romantic that believes in their own creativity first and foremost. Introverted and sometimes hard to get along with. Bad at following rules. As far as Smartphone heroines go, this one falls most in line with Sakura.

Type 5: The Observer

A person who always looks before they leap. Views things objectively and calmly, with a keen analytical eye. Prefers solitude, and tends to look out for those younger than them. As far as Smartphone heroines go, this one falls most in line with Leen.

Type 6: The Loyalist

A person who sticks to their obligations, seeing things through to the end no matter the cost. They always stay true to themselves and operate with sincerity. Their purity is like that of a child's. As far as Smartphone heroines go, this one falls most in line with Hilde.

Type 7: The Enthusiast

An active and curious individual. They always look on the bright side of life and try to impress that positive outlook onto others. Their determination and will tend to be unusually strong. As far as Smartphone heroines go, this one falls most in line with Sue.

Type 8: The Protector

A person with a strong will. Readily faces challenges head-on with a fierce attitude. Paternal in nature, they have a drive to defend the weak. They're filled with determination. As far as Smartphone heroines go, this one falls most in line with Elze.

Type 9: The Mediator

A person who prefers things to be kept harmonious. Prioritizes others, and tolerates small annoyances. They have no particular

prejudices and carry with them a sturdy disposition. As far as Smartphone heroines go, this one falls most in line with Yae.

I used those nine types as the basic framework for the heroines. Though they're not totally bound to them or anything, so there are little parts here and there that don't fit. These nine types all have their drawbacks, too. Type 1 can get pushy with their values, Type 2 easily turn to jealousy, Type 3 tend to be a little vain, Type 4 end up being moody, Type 5 are often isolated, Type 6 have dependency issues, Type 7 frustrate people with their spontaneity, Type 8 do as they please, justifying it as being for others' own good, and Type 9 aren't all that good at expressing themselves. I think I've done a good job of making those drawbacks clear in the heroines, too.

There are a lot of tests you can take online to see what type you have. Just search Enneagram online, it's kind of neat! Oh, just so you know, I'm a Type 4 with Type 5 inclinations.

As for Touya... Well, I feel like he's a Type 2 with Type 9 inclinations.

Now then, which type are you?



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In Another World With My Smartphone: Volume 10

by Patora Fuyuhara

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